

CHRONICLES OF CULTURE

LETTERS & ARTS

MORALS & MANNERS



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Arts &
Power

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Arts & Power



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COMMENT

Webster's defines *culture* as a variation of the verb *cultivate*. It is time, therefore, for us to look at what, as a nation, we are cultivating.

In our government schools, which we persist in calling "public," students are taught that virtually any loose community can be called a society, and that the world is driven by "progress." But Émile Durkheim, one of sociology's fathers, believed that a society cannot exist without sharing certain principles and beliefs, that religion holds a society together. Thus, a change in religion leads to changes in moral values. To Durkheim, society is a religious phenomenon. Max Weber carried this insight further. He credited the Calvinists with having baptized all society and with expanding the idea of worship into every aspect of work. This evoked bitter attacks, of course. Nevertheless, it is now—thanks to Weber and Durkheim—tacitly accepted that sociology and history must accept the reality of intangible influences.

With this in mind, let's look at our world, our civilization. The extent of change in what is now considered acceptable from what was once forbidden is astonishingly sweeping. For example, the members of this civilization shared basic beliefs for centuries, yet they have been discarded in just 100 years. If such an abrupt, widespread change took place in a foreign civilization, our experts would flock to explain it. But since this phenomenon occurred in our own, it is dismissed by summoning a phantom called "progress."

Progress? A hundred years ago the West ruled the world, though seeds of decay were, in retrospect, visible. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, introduced a rationale for racial superiority and a pseudo-scientific argument against religion that created a great deal of mischief. But Darwin largely expressed ideas floating in the air of his time. An insightful book called *The Decline of the Industrial Spirit in English Culture 1850-1900* (Wiener, Rice University) defined the decline. The English disdain for "trade" lured English manufacturers and merchants into working toward a landed country life. This trend led Britain, in the span of a single generation, from 1870 to 1900, into an inability to feed the nation from its own agriculture, and removed the British from the industrial leadership of the world. An interesting parallel of this phenomenon is provided in an article in the April 1983 *Atlantic*. The essay describes how American industry fell from the top to somewhere in the middle of ranking industrial powers in a single generation ranging from the mid-1950's to today. It shows how industrialists were more concerned with profits than with expensive innovations and retooling and so were toppled by foreign competitors who



weren't masking losses and failures with "creative" accounting and governmental subsidies.

In both instances, in the decline of Britain and the decline of the U.S., fundamental shifts occurred in basic values. In both countries, which were once dominated by a religious ethic that sacrificed present gain for future values, short-range rewards took precedence. This is evidenced by the failure of the managerial class in the two countries. Whereas they were once self-reliant, they turned to their governments. The British government nationalized industries; the U.S. government set up a bureaucratic mechanism that provides subsidies. This failure can be discovered earlier, in, for example, the inability of England's industrial and agricultural systems to cope with the demands of the world wars. Not only were the failures results of mechanical decline, but also of a metaphysical one: the turning away from religion.

In both world wars, however, an even darker side of secularization was revealed. Long-standing religious attitudes had restricted behavior—even in war. But in 1914-18, millions were led to useless death by leaders who had lost all scruples. In earlier ages such leaders would not have been obeyed. Yet the people of the West, far from rebelling, marched to their doom. Even Russia's rebellion was gentle, under Kerenski, and brief—and the Russians were soon resubjugated by even more brutal rulers.

In the Second World War the West cast aside all restraints. Britain introduced mass bombings of civilians; we soon did the same. In the U.S.S.R. and nazi Germany, ancient paganism

The Comment is an enlarged version of a speech presented at The Philadelphia Society in April 1983.

returned, as Karl Wittfogel proved. Wittfogel was a Marxist who changed his mind in the concentration camps of Hitler:

My final thoughts go to those who, like myself, were passing through that great inferno of terror. Among them, some hoped for a great turning of the tables which would make them guards and masters where formerly they had been inmates and prisoners. They objected, not to the totalitarian means, but to the ends for which they were being used. Others responded differently. They asked me, if ever opportunity offered, to explain to all who would listen the inhumanity of totalitarian rule in any form.

Wittfogel survived to study the roots of totalitarianism. He researched the huge monuments and immense irrigation systems of Mesopotamia, the Orient, and Latin America, and discerned these to be the results of total despotism. Vast numbers toiled to create systems that controlled agriculture—and people. In those ancient paganisms there was no class system: everyone lived in the service of the despot. Despots in the West were restrained by the nobility. The nobility was sustained by the Christian idea that only God is sovereign, and that all power on earth must be limited. Wittfogel effectively demolished the idea that the class struggle is the key to *universal* history. His second contribution was to show that the absence of class struggle means a despotism is in place. Nevertheless, our government schools continue to discuss Marxism in 19th-century utopian terms. Conservatives, while sympathetic to the idea of elites, have failed to provide a popular defense of why elites are necessary and how they preserve liberty.

Meanwhile, we gaze at the results of secularization in our cities and countryside. Chillingly impersonal glass-hung structures made livable by machinery alone, porno shops in even remote villages. Instead of automobiles we now export dirty movies; where we once imported art and books we now bring in cocaine and heroin.

The conservative movement, although growing, remains largely unfocused. It is hobbled by overintellectuality and a persistent neglect of the arts. Its ranks contain few painters, even fewer composers, and only a handful of professional actors, writers, musicians, playwrights. In some respects, the conservative movement is a sort of intellectual cottage industry, with each cottage intent upon weaving its own patterns. Most of the cottages produce political diatribes, though some lean toward economics. But many of the economically minded are not even contemporary in their observations. They evoke the theology of a free market when no such market exists anywhere in the world. It is worth remembering that after the Bolsheviks realized the German Revolution of 1919 had failed, they shifted to a seduction of German artists. The results are still visible: *The Threepenny Opera* continues to play, some-

where, every day. Brecht was not alone: within three years after the Comintern decided to concentrate on German artists, nearly all had become members of the Marxist mainstream. But our conservative intellectuals seem to find an absorbing interest in Gnosticism and anti-French Revolution British statesmen. It would seem that the situation calls for more contemporary analyses.

The overall problem seems to be that conservatives are not sure of what they want to conserve, and what changes they are willing to accept. We live amid changes introduced by non-conservative forces which many resent and fear, and yet there is no consensus about which changes are inevitable and which must be forever resisted. By gradual, almost imperceptible stages, conservatism has become a political movement, a mainstream political movement in many respects. In that process, conservatives have apparently forgotten that most Americans now fear government, and with good reason. The government can ruin an individual without bothering to take him to court. We are told to elect better people—but suppose there are no better people? What then?

Suppose the debacles so often predicted, unless we change our ways, actually occur? Then what? What is the conservative plan then?

Can conservatives actually envision change at all? Can they speculate upon not only a new administration, but even a new government? After all, our forebears didn't try to reform George III: they replaced his government. I do not place the Reagan Administration in that category, of course, but it is clear that it is incapable of changing the trends that alarm us. It is now obvious that the President has no party, and that both Republican and Democratic politicians no longer believe in party principles: they follow the media agenda.

What this all adds up to is that a loss of faith means a loss of principle, and that these losses are more serious than is generally admitted. If we want a conservative culture, we shall have to think in deeper, braver, broader terms about how to bring such a culture to life. We shall have to drop our perpetual judgments and criticisms of what others say and do, stop talking mainly to each other, and—most important of all—start recruiting the communicators of the arts. We *need* the theater, the literati, the music and painting and architecture: we need to cultivate what once kept our civilization strong in order to restore its strength for today and tomorrow. We need to stand up against the blackmail and rhetorical excesses of racial politics: we need to broaden our activities beyond politics and economics into the whole of American life. We must, if we want to avert the deluge, cultivate a better conservatism than that which has been thus far expressed.

—Otto J. Scott

Mr. Scott is a frequent contributor to *Chronicles of Culture*.

Of Liberal Worship and Conservative Judgment

Joyce Carol Oates: *The Profane Art: Essays and Reviews*; E. P. Dutton; New York.

Kenneth S. Lynn: *The Air-Line to Seattle: Studies in Literary and Historical Writing about America*; The University of Chicago Press; Chicago.

by Bryce Christensen

Beyond any reasonable doubt, Matthew Arnold knew far more than did Samuel Johnson. Curiously, however, he was far less confident about turning his knowledge into literary or cultural judgments. It is quite impossible to imagine the reserved intellectual schoolmaster ever discrediting long-revered works of literature with the assuredness that Johnson evinced when denigrating Milton's *Lycidas* and the poetry of Cowley and Donne. Just as unimaginable is the possibility of Arnold's ever pronouncing the kind of ironclad verdict Johnson gave in answer to Boswell's defense of a woman who left her husband for another man: "My dear Sir, never accustom your mind to mingle virtue and vice. The woman's a whore, and there's an end on't."

The contrast between Johnson's bracing finality and Arnold's cautious deference is best explained in terms of a paradox: Johnson could be assertive because he humbled himself before the God of Christianity; Arnold was forced to be tentative because he dismissed God and arrogated to himself and other artists and critics the task of creating and choosing new objects of worship. Johnson was confident in his moral pronouncements, but not *self*-confident. His resolution reposed in Christian ethical principles far larger than his ego. While vigorously opposing skepticism with regard to religious dogma, Johnson was a bold

freethinker on many literary matters because he regarded literature as human artifice fully subject both to divine standards of morality and order and to human approval or rejection.

Arnold, on the other hand, rejected Judeo-Christianity because its "supposed facts" appeared unreliable to his "modern" mind. What was needed, he therefore argued, was a new "religion" of poetry, in which "the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion." Who was to serve as god in this new religion? Arnold's answer is unclear, but presumably it was either the Poet or his Poem. This, of course, was a tremendously self-serving notion, since Arnold believed his own poetry to be the best expression of "the main movement of mind" in his generation. As he appears in his verse, filled with despondency and alienation, Arnold's new deity does not, however, appear capable of inspiring deep faith—not even in Arnold. A more perplexing problem, since poets are as far apart in their views as Lucretius and Dante, and since every other village boasts its own self-identified poet-god, is how mere mortals are supposed to practice *true* devotion. Arnold assigns this knotty theological conundrum to the critic-become-priest. But since Arnold concedes that the critical power is inferior to the creative one, the critic must approach the body of literature with all

of the confidence of Uzzah approaching the ark.

Nonetheless, as Arnold unhappily perceived, in the new religion of modernity, the priests must perforce judge the gods, not the other way around. Fearful of the fallacies of both the "historic estimate" (unthinkingly endorsing the received tradition) and of "the personal estimate" (legitimizing every idiosyncratic whim) Arnold was hard pressed to articulate any credible rationale to guide the judgment as to which literature was to be canonized as scripture. He admitted that "sometimes . . . for the sake of establishing an author's place in literature, and his relation to a central standard," judgments must be made, but complained that this is "not the most satisfactory work to the critic." How indeed is this unsatisfactory task to be accomplished at all when art itself *is* "the central standard" because it is the only recognized repository of the divine? Arnold answered, "Here the great safeguard is never to let oneself become abstract, always to retain an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what one is saying." He must have realized that in a religion in which "the idea is everything" and artists are gods (or at least god-makers), "truth" is highly subjective and therefore the second part of this prescription wholly vitiates the first. So after a few years of promoting "sweetness and light" and "reason and God's will," Arnold made another attempt to resolve the problem, advocating the use of "touchstones" taken from the "lines and expressions of the great masters" and gave specific examples. He did not, however, bother to explain how the touchstone comparisons were to be made or how the great masters and their best lines and expressions were to be identified in the first place. It is hardly surprising that he relegated "mere judgment and application of principles" to the "second place" in the critic's concern, elevating the acquisition of "knowledge, and ever fresh



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knowledge," to the first position.

Fortunately, though Arnold required the critic to occasionally hold court on the gods, he forbade him from giving commandments to men. The critic, he declared, must forswear "the region of immediate practice in the political, social, humanitarian sphere" in favor of the "more free speculative treatment of things which may perhaps one day make its benefits felt." Indeed, in surveying the French Revolution, Arnold offered not a word against its "fine ideas," but attributed its "crimes and follies" merely to the attempt to give them "immediate political and practical application." Even though he died well before the French attempted to put them into practice, Johnson anticipated Burke in many of his telling critiques of libertarianism, secularism, and egalitarianism. (Johnson to Boswell: "So far is it from being true that men are naturally equal, that no two people can be half an hour together, but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other.") He did not have to read about the September Massacre to know that, even as ideas, revolutionary doctrines were foolish and dangerous because they violated immutable truths concerning the nature of man. These foundational principles were fixed, and, as he dramatized in *Rasselas*, the search for liberating new ones was vain. Accordingly, in Arnold's quest for more and more "fresh knowledge," the apostle of art as religion fulfilled the Apostle Paul's description of one "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

It would be grossly unjust to compare Arnold to Joyce Carol Oates, a writer of far less talent and intelligence. Nonetheless, Ms. Oates's assertion in *The Profane Art* that Matthew Arnold's "disinterested" criticism provided her with a model for these collected pieces is not entirely unwarranted. For Ms. Oates has taken quite seriously Arnold's dogma that art must replace religion and has drawn from that position conclusions which are perfectly consistent and logi-

cal, though Arnold was himself too decent and civilized to advance them. Dismissing "traditional religion as handed down by a priesthood" as "a fantastic spirit-world of wistful and childlike yearnings," she identifies creative art as the only "sacred" dimension of modernity, with criticism helping to provide "profane" illumination (hence the title). In Oates's view, "for both the collective and individual *salvation* of the race, art is more important than anything else, and literature most important of all." A more orthodox believer than Arnold, Oates insists that the critic reverence the creators of art (like herself) as the gods and goddesses they are.

Criticism, she explains, "must take the artist's freedom seriously—it must resist its own conservative and reductive instincts." This apparently means that the Olympians will tolerate no more impious and presumptuous human judgments on the mysteries of divinity; true believers may offer up only ceaseless praise and the sweet fragrance of incense. After lighting a few candles before the images of Virginia Woolf and Paul Bowles and genuflecting at the shrines of Donald Barthelme and Géza Csáth, Ms. Oates invites us to join in a hymn of thanksgiving for an amoral modernist literature which has overthrown "the prejudices of the bourgeois culture" and has repudiated "the tiresome pieties of the Victorians, like those of the Augustans, having to do with the morality of art, and the duties of the artist."

For a liberal like Ms. Oates, the consolations of this worship are prodigious, for the icon of the autonomous artist is finally just a projection of the sovereign self. In Oates's "religion without a reigning deity," the individual ego is free to imitate the artist in filling the metaphysical hole. Conservative artists, of course, remain a problem, since their work inevitably measures human limitations against suprahuman standards. But they can be anathemized for indulging a heretical weakness for value systems, such as ethics and traditional religion, not defined primarily by art and artists.

Thus in a rare exercise of judgment, Ms. Oates censures the "savage judgments" on contemporary culture found in Bellow's work. And, after dividing Flannery O'Connor into "several Flannery O'Connors," she redeems the artist O'Connor from the Catholic "bigot" O'Connor, even if this requires a truly miraculous gloss on Miss O'Connor's assertion that she wrote only because she was Catholic. (Ms. Oates had better hope *her* religion is true, for an afterlife confrontation with the *one* Flannery could prove positively unpleasant.) Then, too, there are those artists like Faulkner and Conrad whose art suggests an affirmative judgment on traditional sex roles; a critical jihad against these schismatics is also in order.

Yet even after Ms. Oates has zealously cleansed the temple of modern art, what kind of "salvation" can it offer? By her alcoholism, her adultery and divorce, and her endlessly self-obsessed confessionism, Anne Sexton certified her identity as an autonomous modern artist. Ms. Oates therefore canonizes her as "a highly

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courageous woman" and her poetry as "a triumphant event in our literature." Still, the spectacle of Sexton's emotional breakdown and suicide is not an attractive one. Because the artists who formulated Oates's credo envisioned only *"this world . . . rendered in all its detail, with no more revulsion for the contradictory, the obscene, the vulgar, the unspeakable, than any anthropologist or chemist might feel confronted with his or her primary material,"* she lacks any strictures against which to measure Sexton's pathologies. So, after becoming vaguely "disturbed and moved" by them, she implausibly argues that "all works of tragedy deal with 'suicide' of a kind" and, even more incredibly, that the final catastrophe was caused by Sexton's weak sense of a masculine God "outside of her."

Ms. Oates is similarly evasive and unconvincing when she blandly labels it "ironic" that modern artists have invariably found that "a kind of hell . . . [is] the only possible place for the liberation of a certain kind of independent and courageous woman." Never—worlds without end—will Ms. Oates peek beneath *this* irony. To do so would reveal that the governing spirit in modern art-become-religion is the same one Milton portrayed defiantly affirming that he had rather "reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." No sanctimonious Pharisee was ever more hypocritically self-justifying than is Ms. Oates when she accuses conservatives of "a refusal to examine one's beliefs."

As Kenneth Lynn's *The Air-Line to Seattle* proves, it is actually liberals and leftists who refuse to examine their beliefs. Dr. Lynn's critical powers are far more potent than Ms. Oates's not just because he is more intelligent (though this is clearly true) but also because he brings to literature a marvelously Johnsonian skepticism about the holiness of modern art and artists. Tearing through liberal hagiography, he demonstrates that Emerson, Whitman, and Hemingway were not gods, not even very admirable mortals. Emerson, who reputedly fathered American literature through his bold ad-

vocacy of self-reliance and his opposition to the Puritan tradition, did not cut himself loose from Christian doctrine and clerical employment until *after* he had secured a sizable business fortune through a dubious courtship of a dying heiress. Whitman, whose paeans to unbridled lust have made him a favorite among homosexual activists, confessed in his private notebook that his perversion made "life a torment . . . [of] diseased feverish disproportionate adhesiveness."

"modern-day intellectuals and their terrible need for radical myths."

Professor Lynn cannot abide left-liberal myths because, like the rock-kicking, woodcock-watching Johnson, he has a deep respect for concrete facts and actual human experience. The refusal to perceive the gap between theory and fact, he finds, is "a telling indication of the intellectual temper of the times." (It is also a likely explanation of *The Nation's* negative review of Dr. Lynn's book.) But

"Contentiousness and sarcasm . . . flashy prose and a sleight-of-hand polemic . . . Lynn's ad hominem spitballs usually whiz by as sophomoric distractions."

—*The Nation*

"He is not above name-calling. . . . Nor is he above the occasional leer."

—*The New Republic*

"Willfully inconsistent . . . just sneaky . . . Lynn misses the point."

—*Village Voice*

Hemingway, the champion of modern masculine bravery, cowardly lied to his mother about his atheism and cravenly shirked the responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood. Dr. Lynn also irreverently trashes the standard liberal readings of Twain's *Huck Finn* and Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" with compellingly documented arguments. The "drop out" approach to Twain's work ignores books both before and after *Huck Finn* in which Twain firmly tied Huck both emotionally and morally to Missouri society and therefore made his thoughts about fleeing to the Indian territory incredible except as a passing boyish fantasy. Contradicting the popular "war wound" explication of Hemingway's story is bountiful biographical evidence suggesting that the ambiguous unpleasantness Nick tries to suppress was merely a fight with his mother.

Turning to historical scholarship, Dr. Lynn proves that contemporary images of Jefferson as an egalitarian communitarianist, of Greenwich Village as a gathering place for refugees from bourgeois horrors, and of leftish New York journalists as unbiased observers of Soviet politics are the specious manufacture of

Dr. Lynn is far more than an iconoclastic collector of facts. He indicts Matthew Brucoli for a "fact-mongering" which evades the need for interpretation, and he censures Gay Allen for failing to draw any conclusion from the sordid details he uncovers in researching Emerson's calculating romance. Like Johnson, he wants both facts and a vision of life within which facts fit and can be interpreted and evaluated.

Though much of this volume is devoted to nay-saying, his nay is grounded in a fundamental yea. With Johnson, Dr. Lynn says nay both to those who would denigrate the nobility of bourgeois man and to those who cannot appreciate the significance of Christianity when manifest as a "living faith, not an ossified piety." He says nay emphatically to all who "rest content with nihilism." So while Ms. Oates leads the nauseous public chorus of liberal critics hailing narcissistic artists as gods, Dr. Lynn stands as a courageous blasphemer who stills the hosannas with a confident and resounding verdict: "This is nonsense, and there's an end on't!" The reader cannot but believe that in private he bends his knee to a better God. □

Eviscerating the Heartland

Gore Vidal: *Duluth*; Random House; New York.

by Thomas Fleming

Gore Vidal has spawned another repulsive novel. Having experimented with historical travesty (*Burr*; *Julian*, 1876) and fag chic (*Myra Breckinridge*), Vidal has turned his fictional abilities to the world of soap operas and drugstore gothic novels. He has not risen above his material. Even the publishers do not seem to know what to do with this one. The puffery on the jacket is limited to two statements: "Duluth tears the lid off Dallas" and "Vidal has put Duluth on the map." How brief is glory—as short as the memory of publishers. Duluth is one of the few middle-sized cities of the Midwest that is actually *on* the literary map. Concord may be transcendentalist country, Mississippi may belong to Faulkner, and Chicago is the city of James T. Farrell, but Duluth, the "Zenith City," was put on the map by Sinclair Lewis, who made it the scene for several novels, including *Babbitt*. Vidal does not mention his predecessor, a lapse that would not be so strange if *Duluth* were not stuffed with literary allusions. The fact is, Vidal neither knows nor cares to know anything about Middle America, including its chroniclers.

The Zenith City Booster Club can breathe easy: *Duluth* has nothing to do with Duluth, even less than *Burr* did with Aaron Burr or *Julian* did with the "apostate" emperor. Vidal's Duluth is a stone's throw from New Orleans and on a clear day you can see the Pacific—or maybe you can't: the author leaves us in suspense. Despite its rich heritage of French culture, this Duluth is an urban nightmare dominated by black gangsters and teeming barrios.

The incidents of this creation (words like *plot* and *novel* are inappropriate) are centered on an alien spaceship, the

Dr. Fleming is editor of The Southerner.

Duluth mayoral race, and a Chicano gang—the Aztec Terrorists Society—dedicated to revenge against the police-woman whose sadistic strip-searches have threatened their manhood. The figures (*characters* would be an exaggeration) include extraterrestrial centipedes who manipulate the world's money markets, a man-hating nurse whose ultimate weapon is the enema, a writer of romances who cannot spell *cat*, and young Clive Hoover, a reputed "fagola" who turns out to be not only straight but also "about the biggest crime lord in the country not of Italian extraction." Above it all broods the figure of Rosemary Klein Kantor, creator of the TV series *Duluth* and, as it turns out, of all the fictional histories through which the cutouts move.

A summary of *Duluth* would be boring and confusing, although not as much as the book itself is. Its tedium is more than anything experienced by Beckett's characters. Characters move back and forth from the TV show to the fictional Duluth, and when they die in Duluth (or is it *Duluth*?) they are reborn in *Rouge Duke*, a *Redbook* serial by Rosemary Klein Kantor. At the end, the centipedes from outer space wipe out the city and begin typing their own version of it on a word processor.

The interplay between fiction and reality is hardly a new idea, and it is now

Pestle succeeded in breaking down the barrier between the world of the audience and the world of the play. Addresses to the audience were a conventional feature of Greek Old Comedy. It might even be argued that a good deal of comedy (Groucho's asides, for example) depend on just that temporary suspension of the dramatic illusion.

But the novel is of a different nature. The "gentle readers" of Fielding and Thackeray are not aimed at interrupting the illusion. They are more like Conrad's elaborate constructions of stories within stories—a way of drawing the reader out of his own world and into the fictional realm, not immediately, but by degrees. Only a few modern writers can astutely merge fiction with reality. The end of Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*, for example, is a tour de force: the novelist takes pity on his suffering hero and grants him a fatal heart attack. But such successes are rare and depend on a peculiar metaphysical talent.

Vidal clearly is no Nabokov. He is not even a Thomas Pynchon. Vidal's stick figures are not the result of some profound sense of high art or part of a philosophical scheme. They only show how bored Vidal has become with real people and the real world. His experimental technique is not metaphysical, only cute—to be generous. His grotesque sex scenes—mostly rape and autoeroticism

"Duluth is clever throughout."

—Time

"The book is very funny."

—Newsweek

a staple with modern and postmodern writers. They can work in the drama, where the scenic illusion is a significant part of the experience of going to a theater. For examples it is not necessary to turn to Brecht or Pirandello. Aristophanes in *The Peace* and Beaumont and Fletcher in *The Knight of the Burning*

—are not a sign of vitality but of world-weariness. Gore is a washed-out aesthete, contemptuous of everything American but too fashionable to entertain the dangerous thought of reactionary alternatives. All the former steam that goaded Mr. Buckley into an explosion is exhausted. He has lost his élan Vidal.

Vidal has been running away from the world for some time, as evidenced by his historical fantasies. This retreat from reality is symptomatic of something it is hard to put a name to, a sort of rottenness and bad faith that afflicts too many writers and intellectuals. Never mind their mediocre talents and inadequate education—those are remediable deficiencies. What cannot be remedied is their self-hate. American intellectuals have given up trying to make sense of themselves in this world, while at the same time rejecting any idea of transcendence. As a consequence, they are compelled to make up their own versions of reality. Kurt Vonnegut takes refuge in sci-fi speculations; Norman Mailer recreates ancient Egypt in his own (coprophiliac) image; and more and more novelists are turning to “historical” novels in which they are openly contemptuous of historical facts. The rarest of all writers today is the serious novelist (or dramatist) who actually deals with contemporary life in straightforward fashion.

The flight from reality is not confined to serious fiction. The popularity of costume romances, soap operas, and fantasy movies is testimony that something strange is going on in the American heartland. Obviously, there has always been a place for literature of fantasy and escape. Much of the West’s major works of literature, from the *Odyssey* to *The Lord of the Rings*, could be described in such terms. But there are important differences. Older fantasies (like Homer’s, Vergil’s, and Dante’s) depended upon a common stock of legend and belief. The Trojan War and the founding of Rome possessed an imaginative reality. The same could be said of works as diverse as Shakespeare’s *Histories* and Tennyson’s *Idylls*. What is more, imaginative literature on the classical model always dealt even more seriously with human problems than more obviously realistic works were able to do. There is, after all, nothing very escapist in Aeneas’ desertion of Dido or the ambition of Henry Bolingbroke.

None of these considerations apply to

our own escapist fantasies. They most clearly do not depend on a common tradition: each writer is free to reinvent the universe according to his whim. The ordinary limitations of history, geography, and even the laws of logic and physics are shattered. Still worse, by cutting loose the ties to the ordinary world they are no longer bound to take any pains with their characters. What we know of Luke Skywalker, J. R. Ewing, or Barth’s Giles Goatboy, could be put in a comic book caption.

It is a strange sort of aesthetic rebellion that lays the ax against the roots of all art. Whatever theories may be entertained

about the nature and function of literature, we cannot escape the old ideas of representation. In our powerlessness, we seek to express ourselves and our lives with, above all, coherence. It may be that our sanest and most significant act, as human beings, is telling stories. The narrative art is older than literature: it is as old as man. But, one by one, the arts have turned their backs on representation. Painters, sculptors, poets, and now novelists abandon the world of common experience in order to pursue their private visions. They are like the sleepers described by Heraclitus: cut off from the common world of ordinary

LIBERAL CULTURE

CBS versus Law & People

A little doubt likely invades anyone who listened to a recent *CBS Evening News* story about the U.S. government’s war on drugs. The network’s “legal” correspondent, one Fred Graham, informed his audience (people’s right to know) that the government was singling out so-called celebrities for investigation. At a certain point in his narrative, however, the information stopped dead, interpretation and advocacy began, and, on the receiving end, people no longer were entitled to know but were required to think in line with CBS’s sympathies. Mr. Graham and his editors were clearly on the side of the celebrities; the editing, manipulation of clips, and choice of arguments all subtly defended three men whom the law had called to account for some hanky-panky with narcotics: Mr. DeLoe, a fancy car producer; Mr. Gerulaitis, a tennis pro; and Mr. Mailer, a writer created by gossip columns and literary agents. What Mr. Graham, in the name of CBS, chose not to say is that there is both a legal and a moral dimension to being a so-called celebrity who violates laws by possessing drugs and using them almost in the open. The enforcement of morals may not work, we all know that, but a request for the rudi-



mentary appearance of propriety may be beneficial. An American celebrity is a propaganda device, an exemplar, whether he ought to be or not. Those stars of yesteryear knew that much, at least. We have the impression that CBS does not buy the necessity of acknowledging this simple social truth: it seems to prefer to accord to the celebrities—shoddy individuals most of them—the right to transgress what the average American honors. This is what makes us suspect that, regardless of the avuncularity of its anchormen, CBS is not on society’s side. □

perception and the living, they see, by their own private lights, dreams without substance or meaning.

The real Duluth, despite its magnificent location on the north shore of Lake Superior, is not a very interesting place, but it is infinitely more interesting than anything Vidal could invent. Sinclair Lewis was a mean-spirited illiterate with none of Vidal's charm, yet he wrought a minor American masterpiece from the unpromising material of a Duluth Rotarian. Lewis's Duluth may be a soulless, heartless place, but his Babbitt is a dreamer and a Romantic. No writer was crueler to American businessmen than Lewis but no one else has managed to catch the touch of the poet in the ambitious boasting of the small-town booster. The difference between the two literary Duluths is a measure of how far we have come since 1922.

The saddest part in all of this is that Vidal is aware, to some extent, of the American flight from reality. Most of

Duluth is a parody of soap operas and romantic novels, even down to the intentionally wooden and portentous dialogue. Rosemary asks E. G. Marshall, "the well-known actor," what he is up to, "aside from making those lucrative commercials—in the high six figures?"

'I'm doing a one-man show . . . on Ezra Pound.' 'Oh, that is a fab notion,' says Rosemary. She has heard the name Pound before, somewhere.

After the first few pages, nearly everyone will get the point, but what of it? It takes more than parody to justify such boring insipidity. Otherwise, Hemingway's *Torrents of Spring* would still be read. Whatever games Vidal thinks he is playing with the reader, he (and his book) are the principal victims. That even so minor a talent as Vidal's should be wasted on what he chooses to call novels is something to be lamented as one more sign of the strangely troubled times in which we find ourselves. □

cial falsehood that structures Polish life. Written before the Solidarity uprisings, the book takes the form of a first-person account of what, if he keeps to his purpose, will be the last day of the narrator's life; for two dissident friends persuade him that morning to immolate himself at eight in the evening before Congress Hall, scene of a massive Communist Party gathering to "celebrate" Poland's 40th (or whatever) anniversary of socialism (i.e., of Soviet imperial control). This terrible goal gives a needed measure of unity and suspense to the episodic movement toward his grim destination, a journey another character aptly likens to the stations of the cross. Before the day is over, Konwicki sardonically unfolds the dynamics of the spiritual crucifixion of a people forced to live what all know to be a lie. Systematic untruth engenders boredom and despair; but to resist nihilism, under such conditions of oppression, is to expose oneself to pain without hope of relief. Yet the narrator does resist, though *A Minor Apocalypse* is anything but a comforting, easily affirmative book.

To the reader unfamiliar with the details and nuances of Polish life, *A Minor Apocalypse* will have its strongest impact as a laconic satire on official Marxist unreality. Everywhere he goes the narrator encounters huge banners boasting "We Have Built Socialism"—an unintended but constantly painful irony to a people living amid physical and sometimes spiritual collapse. The Warsaw through which Konwicki's narrator moves resembles a city under bombardment: apartment complexes are abandoned unfinished, streetcars simply give out, chunks of buildings tumble into the street, bridges collapse. Amid the wreckage vehicles whisk delicacies to the insulated party elite.

But the enemy attacking the city is within—the socialist tyranny that is lauded from every disintegrating edifice. The external chaos objectifies the emotional and moral disorder; in matters small and large, futility, absurdity, and

Beyond the Public View

Tadeusz Konwicki: *A Minor Apocalypse*; Translated by Richard Lourie; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Robert F. Geary

Contemporary Poland, for many reasons, disquiets the West. To those who nurture visions of a painless and peaceful accord between the Soviets and the United States against the supposed "common enemy" of nuclear weapons, the squashing of Solidarity to placate Moscow forms an unwelcome reminder of the brutal realities of Soviet imperialism which it has long been fashionable to ignore. Similarly, the spectacle of real tyranny reveals the rhetorical hollowness of the domestic

cant about "repression" heard whenever there is resistance (nearly always sporadic and feeble) to some new cultural assault on traditional ways. Nor can the helplessness of the West in the face of Poland's misery be anything but frustrating to those who entertain no faddish illusions, who know that if the Cold War is ended it was finished largely by a unilateral act of Western self-deception.

Tadeusz Konwicki's *A Minor Apocalypse* deals with repression; like the news from Poland, it is disturbing. However, Konwicki's jaggedly intense novel explores dimensions of repression not captured by television shots of tanks and troops challenging striking workers or by journalistic accounts of mass arrests and forced newspaper closings. As a novelist Konwicki charts the emotional and spiritual deformations wrought by years of enforced submission to the offi-

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entrapment sap the human spirit. Perhaps a sign of the hunger for truth, people avidly buy and carry the newspaper, yet nobody reads the *Trybuna Ludu*, the official Party organ and a conduit of programmatic unreality. More serious is the gnawing sense of futility surrounding opposition to the regime. Such resistance, a moral necessity, enjoys some obscure degree of toleration; indeed, an opposition of some sort appears desired by the state, perhaps to demonstrate some of the "liberalization" Western observers so much want to find. In this atmosphere self-doubt and self-hatred fester. Thoughts of biological determinism, suggesting that anything one does is part of some system beyond one's control, haunt the narrator. Indeed, part of the regime's terrible, inert strength lies in the very bankruptcy of the Marxist dogmas it officially and fulsomely propounds as its justification. For where even the state officials know the charade of state socialism, what point is there to protest? Public protest, as we understand it, rests on the assumption that the sight of superior dedication and sacrifice either can demoralize if not convert the oppressor or can move some compassionate third party to intervention. But where ruthless superior force blocks both outside intervention and internal rebellion and where the proxy government is already demoralized, what can sacrificial gestures accomplish? On this dilemma turns much of the novel's severe comedy. Thus when a remorseful party hack begins to turn his televised speech into a denunciation of the party, nobody can hear him, for people routinely watch these propaganda spectacles with the sound turned down. His speech—planned and memorized for years in secret—has less impact than his crazed attempt to undress before the cameras—itsself "proof" of his need for institutional confinement on psychiatric grounds. Even more bizarre are the rationalizations of a government censor who maintains that in supporting the Marxism that stultifies Russia he is covertly keeping Poland from being engulfed altogether by its more powerful

neighbor whose dynamism is negated by stale 19th-century ideas. In the Orwellian doublespeak of a government interrogator comes an analogous point: "We are free because we have imposed our own slavery."

The disturbing qualities of *A Minor Apocalypse* are not, however, limited to its depiction of a tyranny at once bereft of legitimacy yet mindlessly strong. The book also disorients some of our usual expectations of "the novel." American readers are likely to have accustomed themselves either to the extreme demands of technique in the "serious" novel (the hyperallusiveness of Pynchon, for instance) or to the easy conventionality of popular thrillers, potboilers, and the like. Konwicki's novel is different in ways fitting neither category. Where we have come to be alert for ironical distances between the author and characters, here

the author, narrator, and hero merge. (The translator sees this as an avant-garde touch, but it may strike many as old-fashioned, harkening back to the fiction of earlier centuries in which authors freely addressed their readers.) Here the narrator frequently engages in moral and metaphysical speculations partaking more of what we may think belongs in the essay or diary than the novel until we recall that the novel has always been something of a catchall form, easily incorporating elements of these and other types of writing.

A more serious problem than our overly neat notions of novelistic purity is the matter of particularity or topicality. Most readers know next to nothing about the specifics of life in Poland; thus, considerable portions of Konwicki's novel will remain annoyingly opaque. Readers can tell, even without the introduction's guidance, that certain characters the

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture*

Leaves of Grass

"All over the world, *Leaves of Grass* has been imitated and echoed, but the theory behind it has not, I think, been fully understood. The essential clue is to be found in the second inscription, 'As I Ponder'd in Silence.' A phantom, 'Terrible in beauty, age, and power,' rises before the poet and tells him that there is but one theme for poetry: war. The poet answers that he also sings war, 'a longer and greater' one than any,' and that he also promotes brave soldiers. The phantom, of course, stands for epic poetry; Whitman is telling us that the whole book should be read as a single epic. The epic of democracy, obviously. We tend to read it as a series of individual poems; the fact is that the writer went on enlarging it, from edition to edition, under the same all-inclusive title."

—from "Leaves of Grass"
by Jorge Luis Borges

Also:

Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus—Perceptibles
Waste of Money—The American Proscenium—Stage—Screen
Art—Music—Correspondence—Liberal Culture—Journalism

narrator meets are intended to represent particular figures in Polish intellectual circles (often ones with whom Konwicki, a filmmaker as well as a writer, has disagreements). Yet the identities of these people and the precise nature of the quarrels will remain closed to most readers. A longer introduction than Richard Lourie's two pages of useful comments would help Konwicki's work receive the wider readership it deserves in this country; even so, obstacles would remain. We need, for example, to know more about the political situation of intellectuals in Poland, and especially of the position of Konwicki in regard to the authorities; but knowing the names of his targets is not likely to make more meaningful to an American audience the author's frequent thrusts at other Polish cultural figures. Fortunately, the suspense in the plot and the graphic nature of the exposure of the depredations of totalitarianism hold the attention of readers puzzled by certain encounters.

Konwicki's mixture of straightforward realism with satirical exaggeration—not in itself an unusual technique—has about it a deadpan quality that, given our likely ignorance about Polish life, makes it not always clear where the depiction of dismal reality ends and satiric fantasy starts. At times the demarcation is clear: the notorious party habit of manipulating statistics to fulfill five-year plans and the like becomes, in Konwicki's novel, entirely surreal—nobody knows even the correct day, month, or year. But, for example, do Poles usually watch televised party-propaganda binges with the sound off? In a world where official lies are both pervasive and transparent, this seems plausible, though one cannot be sure it is not another satiric touch.

Generating the strength as well as the difficulties of the book is a fierce immediacy, a desire, as simple and as old as the novel itself, to know and tell the truth. Such urgency breaks through distinctions between essay and prose fiction, realism and fantasy. Truth of any sort—whether simple factual accuracy,

LIBERAL CULTURE



The Glories of Comity

Among the anomic gang that edits and publishes the *Village Voice*, one man seems to us to stand above the unbridled rape of common sense and normative ethics in its pages. His name is Jack Newfield and, on occasion, he manifested some deference to the notions of intellectual and political fairness. No longer. Each November Mr. Newfield publishes something called "Newfield's Annual Thanksgiving Honor Roll," in which he routinely lauds creeps; however, up to now, he always tried to come up with one or two names deserving a modicum of respect. In 1983, he did not deviate from the routine (the worst creep honored: Mr. Seymour Hersh), but in the noncreep category, he gave a write-up to one of his awardees which induces us to suspect that we overrated Mr. Newfield's

ability to rise above the ordinary anti-reason thuggery perpetrated by VV on a weekly basis. Extolling Sen. Edward Kennedy (positively a noncreep) for delivering his well-publicized speech at Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty Baptist College, Mr. Newfield writes:

Kennedy, on that night, delivered the single greatest speech by a modern politician I have ever read . . . [he] spoke in support of universal values, and was not a limited trumpet call to a liberal constituency. In the biblical lion's den, addressing 7000 skeptical students, Kennedy spoke for religious doubt, diversity, tolerance, democracy, acts of conscience, dissent, the ERA, and the nuclear freeze. He quoted Christ, Pope John, and the 25th Chapter of Matthew. Twenty years from now this speech will be published in anthologies, alongside the Federalist Papers of Madison, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and FDR's first Inaugural Address.

But strangely, Mr. Newfield gave not one single word of praise to those 7,000 Moral Majority skeptics who politely applauded Sen. Kennedy's words that undoubtedly sounded quite at odds, if not inimical, to their own beliefs and convictions, and who, thereby, gave a glorious lesson about ideological, cultural, and political pluralism to Sen. Kennedy's own constituency at Harvard, Stanford, Yale, or wherever, before which a Jerry Falwell, a Weinberger, or a Kirkpatrick have no civil or human right to speak their minds. In an adjacent paragraph, Mr. Newfield confers a laurel on Congressman Richard Ottinger (positively a creep) hailing him as being:

. . . among the dozen best members of the House of Representatives when it comes to bending power toward humane values.

No wonder that Mr. Newfield idolizes Rep. Ottinger. They are partners in pliability with respect to the way that they twist and contort humane values that aren't correctly coded or labeled for listing on the liberal agenda. □

honest interpretation, or personal integrity—is scarce in Konwicki's world. Hence the narrator's anguished hunger for a hold on reality drives him to list recipes, to berate other intellectuals (particularly those devoted chiefly to formal artistic purities), and to wrestle with the meaning of existence. Seemingly unable to derive sustaining comfort from Poland's strong Catholicism, Konwicki nevertheless struggles to retain human dignity amid what appears to be triumphant institutional falsehood. At times the bitter, high-strung voice verges on suicidal despair:

I am approaching the finish line.
I am in the final turn. I would like to
say farewell to you somehow or other. I
long to howl in an inhuman voice
so that I
can be heard in the most distant
corner of the
planet and perhaps even in the
neighboring
constellations or where the Lord God
resides.
Is that vanity? Or a duty? Or an
instinct which
commands us castaways, us cosmic
castaways, to
shout through the ages into starry
space.

A Minor Apocalypse is, finally, more than a howl against the darkness. Its human victory lies in not capitulating to amorality, unreality, and nihilism in spite of the narrator/author's tormenting sense of the helplessness of his own position, of the Polish people, and, at another level, perhaps of humanity itself. The quirky, distraught tone, the attendant narrative shifts, the leaps from narrow topicality to metaphysical anguish—all these features, difficult at times for an American reader, join to create a compelling depiction of a man and a society in extremis yet spiritually unconquered. Though the hope has no concrete object, there is hope in the novel. Nothing, it seems, can rescue Poland from its nightmare of suffering; yet in the very suffering of the people, the narrator comes to believe, may reside the seed of some final triumph,

some apocalyptic reversal of the darkness holding the land.

Konwicki has created no characters of major imaginative dimension. Nor is his satire, though powerful, likely to achieve the stature of Orwell's classic rendering of the totalitarian hells of our century. Nonetheless, *A Minor Apocalypse* is important and worthwhile. It takes us where cameras and reporters cannot go and gives us the emotional, moral, and spiritual feel of a world frighteningly unlike our own. And in so doing it accomplishes what good writing

should: it clarifies life. With little of the clever convolutions of style and structure familiar to readers of the apocalyptic fantasies of, say, Vonnegut, Coover, or Pynchon, Konwicki's novel should bring to mind the difference between the self-indulgent, masochistic imaginings of our cultural elite and the real tortures that make men cry for the release of catastrophe. To rescue from fashionable trivialization the meanings of "imperialism," "repression," and "apocalyptic yearning" is to uncloud the reader's mind—a worthy goal for a good book. □

Horrors & Hope

Paul Johnson: *Modern Times: The World From the Twenties to the Eighties*; Harper & Row; New York.

By Allan C. Carlson

Impresario Sergei Diaghilev of the *Ballet Russe* rose to give his address. The year was 1905. "We are witnesses to the greatest moment of summing-up in history," he declared:

in the name of a new and unknown culture, which will be created by us, and which will also sweep us away. That is why, without fear or misgiving, I raise my glass to the ruined walls of the beautiful palaces, as well as to the new commandments of a new aesthetic. The only wish that I, an incorrigible sensualist, can express, is that the forthcoming struggle should not damage the amenities of life, and that the death should be as beautiful and as illuminating as the resurrection.

True to this prescience, revolutionary changes in culture, politics, economics, and technology did then pour upon the world, with dazzling speed. But the face of the new order proved to be far more malevolent and bloodthirsty than Diaghilev

or any of his generation could have imagined. The death of the old order was agonized, horrible, and complete. The resurrection seemed at times stillborn. Looming far above the landscape by the 1980's was The Monster State, at once the great victor and the central failure of the 20th century. Over 100 million corpses lay at its feet, the victims of violent or unnatural deaths instigated by state action; our century's unprecedented sacrifice to a new, cruel, and voracious god.

In *Modern Times: The World From the Twenties to the Eighties*, Paul Johnson traces the course of this sorry, bloody era. With literary skill and scholarly panache, he shatters the cherished myths, beloved delusions, Marxist lies, and liberal flimflam that have passed for historical fact in recent decades. By and large, Johnson's is a grim tale, relieved only by moments of light and progress during the 1920's and 1950's. Through his luminous metaphors, rich analogies, and unexpected comparisons, however, Johnson brings order out of the century's chaos and helps to restore to the historian's enterprise both common sense and a commitment to transcendent truth. The past and present will not appear quite the same to anyone who reads and honestly ponders this book.

Johnson draws his dominant themes

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in broad strokes. First, he insists that there are no historical inevitabilities. For example, he argues that the collapse of the British Empire was not preordained. Rather, it fell primarily because there was no longer "the will to keep this elaborate structure functioning." Similarly, in surveying the "watershed year" of 1941—"From which mankind has descended into its present predicament"—Johnson emphasizes the decisive role played by individual choice. "Hitler and Stalin played chess with humanity," he writes. "Neither man represented irresistible or even potent historical forces. . . . We have here the very opposite of historical determinism—the apotheosis of the single autocrat."

The author stresses "the holistic principle," through which political events and moral tendencies are seen as exhibiting consequences throughout the world. As example, he argues that industrializing Japan became infected by the moral nihilism rising in the West and "so cast itself into the very pit of twentieth century horror."

More importantly, Johnson stresses the awful consequences of the breakdown of the "highly developed sense of personal responsibility" and the "duty toward a settled and objectively true moral code" which lay at the heart of 19th-century Europe. In their place rose moral relativism, a knife which would "help cut society adrift from its traditional moorings in the faith and morals of Judeo-Christian culture." But again, such a transformation had consequences even far beyond the once-Christian continent. "The tragedy of interwar China," Johnson writes, "illustrates the principle that when legitimacy yields to force, and moral absolutes to relativism, a great darkness descends and angels become indistinguishable from devils."

Also hammered home as a dominant theme of our century is the new worship of politics, a cult which rose in the advanced nations to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the old religious impulse. "Hitler, like Lenin, was the product of an

age increasingly obsessed by politics," the author suggests. "He never seriously attempted to make his living by any other means and he was only really at home, like Lenin, in a world where the pursuit of power . . . was the chief object and satisfaction of existence." Drawing connections across the decades, Johnson ascribes the same characteristics to the French-educated leaders of the Khmer Rouge who, as "Sartre's children," ordered the mass genocide of their own people: "Like Lenin, they were pure intellectuals. They epitomized the great destructive force of the twentieth century: the religious fanatic reincarnated as professional politician."

So, believing in the freedom of the will and in personal responsibility, Johnson clearly distinguishes history's swelling torrent of villains from its shrinking rank of heroes. The former group includes expected figures such as Stalin and Hitler ("fellow ideologues" building utopias "on a fundamental division of mankind into elites and helots" who were opponents only through "the accident of race"); Mao Tse-tung ("an oriental Hitler" who "loved politics as theatre" and "hated 'civilization'" as much as the German *fürher*); India's Jawaharlal Nehru ("the leading exponent of the higher humbug"); and Indonesia's Achmad Sukarno (the prime example of "the political religiosity and the inner heartlessness of the post-colonial leadership").



But Johnson's list of the enemies of society also embraces less expected names, men who moved through the shadows of our century and who "sought to create climates rather than shape specific policies." Men like Lytton Strachey, center of Britain's effete and sodomizing Bloomsbury Group, who spent the Great War writing *Eminent Victorians*, a book ridiculing "precisely those virtues and principles the men in the trenches were trying to uphold" and which proved "far more destructive of the old British values than any legion of enemies." Men like Edwin Montagu, named Undersecretary of State for India in 1919, who "suffered from that corrosive vice of the civilized during the twentieth century. . . . guilt." And men like United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, severe, humorless, probably sexless, "guilt personified," and "determined that the West should expiate it."

Johnson's painfully smaller roster of the culturally and politically courageous includes Joseph Conrad, called the "only substantial writer. . . whose vision [today] remains clear and true. . . ." It embraces Warren G. Harding, labeled as the victim of a vicious and sensationalized historiography, as "the only President in American history who actually brought about massive cuts in government spending," and as an "agreeably liberal" chief executive who cleared the jails of Woodrow Wilson's political prisoners. It claims Calvin Coolidge, a man "wholly uncorrupted by power," who most comprehensively carried into our age the "founding principles of Americanism: hard work, frugality, freedom of conscience, freedom from government, respect for serious culture." It also embraces a handful of postwar figures: Harry Truman, whose "instincts were democratic and straightforward"; Dwight Eisenhower, "the most successful of America's twentieth-century presidents"; and "a group of European titans"—Conrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, and Charles de Gaulle—who reached back to an older, better value system "to revivify the corpse of a

Europe which had slain itself."

Found throughout the book, moreover, is the figure of Winston Churchill, serving at once as Paul Johnson's alter ego and as the conscience of the Western Christian World, challenging the dominant forces of the age ("You might as well legalize sodomy as recognize the Bolsheviks," he exclaimed in 1919), struggling—often alone—to hold back the apocalypse, always managing to be present at the major axes of time (astonishingly, Churchill was actually sitting in the visitors' gallery of the New York Stock Exchange on October 24, 1929 when the stock market boom began to collapse).

Of course, some personalities fall between these camps. While Johnson labels Herbert Hoover "one of the tragic figures" of his era, he also criticizes him as the first true American social engineer, as a corporatist and Keynesian, and as the

prototype of the new and dangerous activist politician. Francisco Franco, while certainly "cold" and "unlovable," is nonetheless called "one of the most successful of public men of the century." As a soldier "in the tradition of the Romans, the crusaders, [and] the conquistadors" who "spent his entire political career seeking to exterminate politics," Franco draws some admiration from the historian as an honest, if archaic spirit swimming against the tide.

Yet in general, Johnson spends little time agonizing over the nuances of judgment. Absolute evil is loose in the world, he believes, and its partisans are widely spread. But what the author sacrifices in terms of lack of caution, oversimplification, and strained generalizations, he more than recovers in the sharpness and moral vigor of his argument. For Paul Johnson, at least, nothing is relative.

Least of all when drawing broad com-

parisons across time and space. The Third French Republic, he argues, "had been the embodiment of the notion 'small is beautiful,'" sporting a declining population, a stagnant economy, and a highly developed cult of the "little man," the small farm, the small factory. "It was dead even before the Germans defeated it," he adds with implicit warning, "and collapsed into a heap of dust in the summer of 1940." Hitler's fear of race poisoning and the latter-day fear of environmental poisoning, Johnson suggests elsewhere, shared a common psychology: "As with the . . . ecologists, [the German racists] thought race-poisoning was spreading fast, that total disaster was imminent, and that it would take a long time to reverse even if the right policies were adopted promptly." He casts Hitler as a precursor of the rock musician, an artist-politician who designed and set the scenes of his oratory with "enviable skill" and who was "the first to appreciate the power of amplification" and the "devilry" of the light show. The author suggests that the pacifism of the 1930's, with its "highly emotional atmosphere" and "an ostensible concern for humanity forming a thin crust over a morass of funk," is quite suggestive of this decade's nuclear scare. Such comparisons would be avoided by most professional historians as facile exercises. Less inhibited by the rigors of academe, Johnson presses ahead, searching for—and often finding—his absolute truths.

Johnson's treatment of colonialism deserves special note. It is easily the best short discussion now extant of this sorely misunderstood subject. Most impressively, he deflates the whole phenomenon—gassed up by endless harangues at the United Nations—back to its real size. The author writes:

Colonialism was, in essence, a cartographic entity. . . Seen from maps, colonialism appeared to have changed the world. Seen on the ground, it appeared a more meticulous phenomenon which could and did change little.

LIBERAL CULTURE



The Newest Health Service

Publicized notions of human sociosexual conduct get curiously and curiously. There was the woman in New York who taught classes on masturbation; now there is one Cynthia Silverman of Los Angeles who "conducts a workshop for married women who are having, or thinking of having, extramarital affairs." Ms. Silverman's motives, of course, are of the high-

est order: she wants to see that "they don't do it moronically or hurt themselves or their families." Whether she mentions in her classes the miseries resulting from infidelity is not highlighted in this promotional effort.

Silvermans of all kinds, and their ruthless imbecility, have been with us always, yet the puzzling aspect of the matter lies in its presentation. The article from which the above quotes were taken did not appear in *National Enquirer* or *Village Voice*. It was put out over the AP wire service, by the folks who supposedly supply this country with the fast-breaking, important news of the day. It was printed not in some metropolitan daily's ultra-progressive lifestyle section but in a small-town, supposedly family newspaper, under an approving title: "Cheating can be healthy . . ." Healthy for whom? For the high school kids who look through the paper each day for local sports news and cafeteria menus? For the young husbands and wives browsing for local news and grocery-store sales? □

It came easily; it went easily. Few died either to make it or break it.

Colonialism's importance, he suggests, lay rather in what it was not. It generated grandiose illusions of power before 1945. Thereafter, it bred unjustified grievances.

What lessons does Johnson draw from the experiences of the last 60 years? A wholly unjustified Western guilt, he concludes, has been the "prime dissolvent of order and justice." He adds that self-imposed restraints by civilized powers in the pursuit of international objectives have proven equally disastrous: "They

are interpreted by friend and foe alike as evidence, not of humanity, but of guilt and lack of righteous conviction." Above all, he insists that only a fixed moral code rooted in transcendent religion can steer men clear of the abyss and toward the improvement of the human condition. With a hint of optimism, he suggests that secularism and militant atheism seem now to be in retreat. So it is with Solzhenitsyn and the Polish Pope that Paul Johnson finds hope, the primal, purely human emotion that the horrors of our century have not yet managed to extinguish. □

Transcendence of Mere Opinion

Thomas Mann: *Reflections of a Non-political Man*; Frederick Ungar, New York.

by John Moeller

The true artist living in a time dominated by politics finds himself traversing a path that is both arduous and dangerous. He begins with a search that is committed to life rather than to just the intellect; that search is replete with ambiguity and doubt and is hostile to dogmatism and the treatment of mere opinion as truth. He must be wary of the ensuing danger that the ambiguity will become so confusing and the doubt so alienating that he may want to leap into the abyss of nothingness. Although some do become libertines and a rare few seem to be able to lean endlessly into the abyss while successfully hanging onto the search, many an artist needs and discovers some higher meaning that liberates from potential despair. Even then he must never become content with that liberation, for the danger always remains that he will turn from the abyss of ambiguity and doubt, forget the search that

once seemed so necessary, and adopt a new form of dogmatism. Instead, the artist must learn to totter on the edge, believing while doubting, radicalizing while conserving, living while intellectualizing.

Thomas Mann is a teacher and philosopher, but primarily an artist, in his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*. In these reflections, penned at the time of World War I, Mann takes us on a prolonged journey that examines nuance after nuance, considers argument and counter-argument, and teaches us much about the relationship between the artist and the world in which he resides. He persuasively maintains that art must reject politics and he affirms the values of the artist. He is most valuable, however, because he shows by example that the artist never can rest comfortably with either total rejection or total affirmation: the artist is caught in a web of contradictory pulls that place him at odds with the society in which he lives and from which—at a higher level—he draws comfort and meaning.

Politics is the artist's most profound enemy. Perhaps this is not true of the politics practiced in the Greek polis, but it certainly applies to the politics of both Mann's time and 20th-century America, both of which have roots in the Enlightenment view of the world. Enlightenment

politics offends the artist because it divides human life into the empirical and metaphysical, is concerned with social order and not the personal soul, and advocates democracy and equality rather than rank and excellence. Having made that division, it then relies on the intellect to advance empirical propositions about society, which it claims to be truth. To be sure, others have done this before—to wit, the Sophists and the Gnostics (and we have our own dogmatists in America today—the egalitarians of the left and the modern gnostics of the right)—but the real villain, according to Mann, is the French Revolution and its discovered truth of our age: democracy is the way to human happiness and a virtuous society. These Sophists, Gnostics, Jacobins, Egalitarians are all philodoxers—lovers of opinion—who have stumbled across an appealing opinion, raised it to the level of truth, and foisted it upon the rest of mankind, artists included.

The artist must shout *no*, regardless of the opinion's particular content. The artist, a gypsy who wanders from place to place and idea to idea, never commits any place or idea to memory, but instead continually searches for life in all of its fullness. Whereas the politician expounds myriad goals (happiness, virtue, a just society, a quality education for every individual, a satisfying job for each worker), the artist advances no goals and his art never serves as means to some other end. Other than life itself, the artist begins with nothing and is committed to nothing. Pure art is pure process and its meaning rests both in the act of creation and in the act of reception, and even then only when the creator (the artist) and the receiver (the reader, listener, viewer) come to it with no anticipation, no expectation. It is in that process of creating or receiving that one begins to know life; if the intellect and its dogmatic theories are permitted to interfere, all may be lost. Recall that scene in *Anna Karenina* where Levin cuts the hay perfectly when he works naturally and in tune with life; the moment his intellect begins to ob-

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serve the naturalness of his cutting he cuts erratically. Likewise, art is life in the moment of creation and must resist the pull of the intellect if it is to maintain its grasp of life.

To reach and then hold that level of purity in art is nearly impossible. It would mean that each artistic creation could be observed only once, for on the second and succeeding times one brings images, thoughts, and expectations to the work, and after many times one begins employing the intellect to analyze and critique the work. Thus, it is more useful to think of degrees of artistic purity. Mann suggests, for example, that music is the most pure of arts; there are no words to convey meaning and by reaching the innermost emotions it can stir great feelings. Poetry, especially when it focuses primarily on words, sounds, and form, rather than meaning, is considerably more pure than literature. Indeed, literature, with its democratizing tendency, frequently is an ally of politics, and Mann readily confesses that he, too, has contributed to the advance of progress—and the subsequent destruction of music—through his activities as a literary writer. And yet, his literature is significantly more artistic than that of the social novel and the European writers he so despised. Nor must one let the subject matter of a writing confuse in evaluating its artistic nature: the socialist realism of Soviet novels reveals little of life even when it never mentions politics, whereas a seemingly social-political novel like Robert Penn Warren's *All The King's Men* is artistic because it reveals life rather than explaining or justifying it according to some dogma.

That there is not much pure art in contemporary America should not be surprising. Mann's imagery applies to our time as well: it is as if the artist has mounted a horse moving in a particular direction and has the option of getting off or riding it to the end. It is a fact that politics has won the day, and pure art—art for art's sake—no longer has an audience. If Mann expected his art to stir the

feelings and raise the spirit of his countrymen, he had no choice but to resort to literature. And that is why the American Flannery O'Connor created such grotesque characters and outrageous incidents in her stories: in these political times the artist may have no choice but to shock the reader in order to get attention. Practically speaking, if the artist is dedicated to striking a responsive chord in the hearts of fellow human beings, the artist no longer can afford absolute purity.

"Mann's reputation as a thinker will take some knocks."

—*New York Times Book Review*

Furthermore, the artist does not have to reject the possibility of knowing simply because he rejects the dogmatic opinions of politicians. The artist searches and creates because life has meaning, and it is not surprising that the artist therefore discovers and pronounces competing values. Much of Mann's book is an explanation of and advocacy for the higher values that he sees politics and democracy destroying. His fervent praise of Germany and his abject hostility toward France might appear as jingoism, but that is an unfair reading. Germany and France are merely representatives of two world views that Mann believed had been clashing for some time.

He sees France as the embodiment of society radicalized in the name of progress. The result is a leveling that treats everyone the same and a democracy that means nothing more than citizen participation in the state. France may be the epitome of civilization, but civilization, hand-in-hand with politics, dissolves the state and eventually the individual. Germany is praised as the last resistance to that movement. The German fatherland transcends the mere political state, and its *Volks* cannot be found anywhere else in Europe. It is culture, not civilization, that provides both form and order and binds the German people. Indeed, Mann even praises the war in Europe because it reminded the German people of their music, their humanity, their spirit—their culture—and of the need to pro-

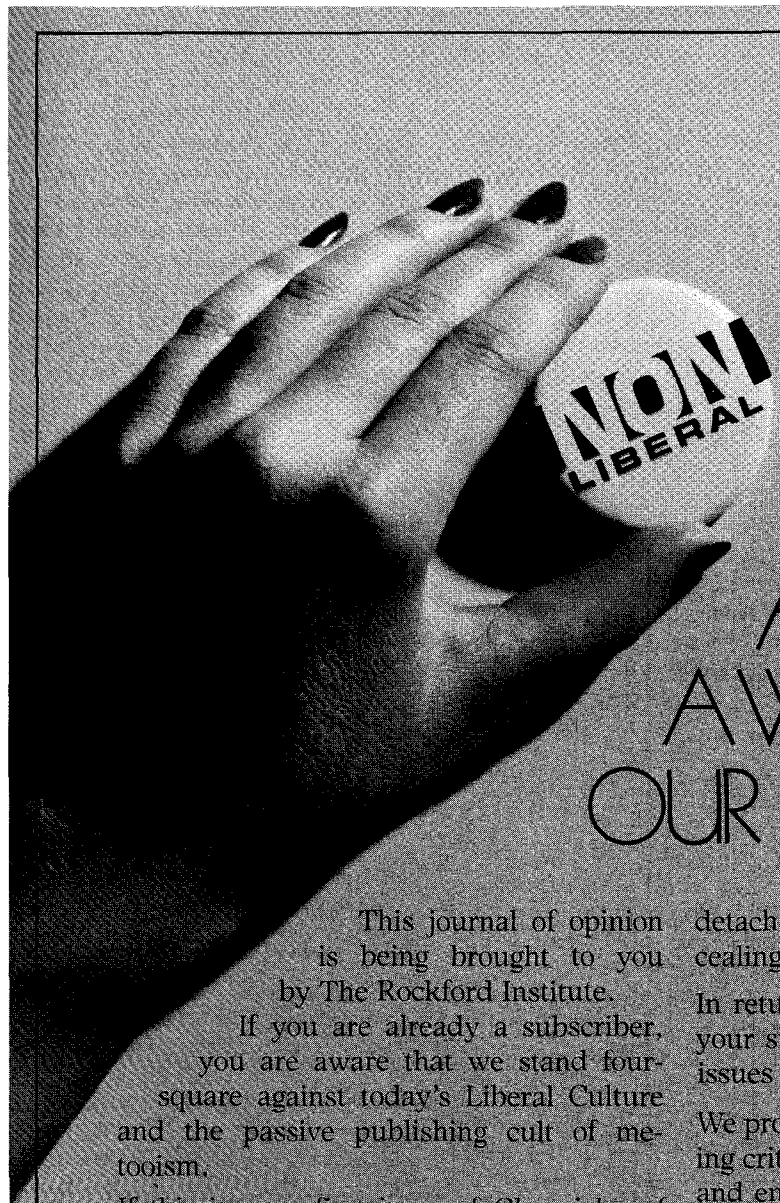
test the radicalizing democratization that had spread throughout Europe.

One might ask why the artist's view should be regarded as more valuable than the politician's. The answer, and ultimately the key to why art and politics are in conflict, is that the artist is not interested in entering the fray of competing opinions, but rather seeks to transcend mere opinion with an inquiry that might lead to the realm of truth. That is,

politics and art differ in kind. The political focuses on and ends with society; art begins where politics ends and addresses the essential dimension of our personal lives. Thus, while politicians strive to satisfy material wants and needs, the artist speaks to our spirituality; while politicians praise our equality at the ballot box, the artist glorifies our human equality; while politicians criticize the policies of previous administrations, the artist examines the way we live on a daily basis. Indeed, the real reason that art is conservative is that it attempts to conserve those values that constant preoccupation with politics has caused us to forget.

This is why Mann is correct in regarding Dostoevski as a greater writer than Tolstoy. Dostoevski knew politics better than most writers; his novels are reactions to the politics of his Russia. Yet, he does not write about politics, but instead sparks the religious element in our lives. Tolstoy, whose later works are superficially more religious and pious, is in fact much more the student and critic of society's values. It is not surprising that the Russian dissidents read Dostoevski while in the camps, and it is not surprising that their reading often leads to conversions. Tolstoy may write of salvation, but his works are imbued with society; Dostoevski may seem to write of society, but his works are imbued with salvation.

Today we need artists like Dostoevski. Prior to the ill-fated division of life into



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two distinct spheres, art may not have served any unique function. The soulcraft was the responsibility of politics and one could speak about politics and religion in the same breath. Who is concerned with the soul now? And who talks of spirituality without a tinge of embarrassment? Certainly not the politicians who are trying to save the world. And although the scientists can tell us much about the universe, they say little about the humans who inhabit the universe. If one is fortunate, an occasional sermon from the pulpit will help, and if one is diligent, an occasional philosopher or theologian will shed insight. For most of us, however, it is the artistic vision that is best able to transcend the mundane, political world and give us a glimpse of life in its fullest.

To be sure, the artist must never let himself become a political instrument, nor can he turn his back on the ambiguity and doubt that instigated his quest. When the artist begins to think of himself as the purveyor of values, he is likely to become self-righteous, morally secure, and just another dogmatist competing for attention in a political world. At the same time, in a world and an age where politics is pervasive, we no longer can afford art for art's sake, but must appeal to our artists to conserve those higher values and to make them accessible to all of us. It may be that what we want and need in these times are prophets who do not think of themselves as prophets, seekers of truth who never are satisfied with their answers. □

Yet in his descriptions of the Soviet Union Salisbury again displays both the strengths and weaknesses of journalism in general and the *New York Times* in particular. The strengths include his ability to convey detail (his preservation of C. L. Sulzberger's description of a Soviet functionary as a "mechanized cockroach" is in itself almost worth the price of the book), as well as his grasp of Soviet political infighting (it has been remarked that in following Soviet politics a familiarity with the *Cosa Nostra* is far more useful than a graduate degree in Slavic studies; Salisbury's facility in this field may owe something to the fact that he was a UP reporter in Chicago in Al Capone's time). And, in stark contrast to Walter Duranty, one of his predecessor correspondents for the *New York Times*, Salisbury quickly recognized the "dark shadow of Stalin's evil."

Yet Salisbury's weaknesses ultimately outweigh his strengths at any level of discourse beyond the most specific and particular. His grasp of political theory, for example, is shaky. As Salisbury expresses it:

I have always had a hard time trying to understand the principles of the Republican party, to which I belong.

The same is true of economics and Marxism. Salisbury goes out of his way to pour contempt on anyone who thinks that understanding the Soviet Union might be facilitated by studying:

Marxism, whatever that is, and the 'philosophy' of the Soviet government, its political jargon and all that.

Ignorance of Marxism, economics, and political science is not an ideal quality to bring to a country maniacally obsessed by all three; thus, Salisbury's condescension frequently leads him into extraordinary blunders. He tells us, for instance, that a counselor at the United States embassy:

approached Russia via Marx, Engels,

Traveling in Spiraling Circles

Harrison E. Salisbury: *A Journey for Our Times: A Memoir*; Harper & Row; New York.

by Henry L. Mason III

A Journey for Our Times is a frustrating, almost schizophrenic book. One approaches it with anticipation, if only because the author is an experienced journalist with a unique fund of knowledge about the Soviet Union. But ultimately, Salisbury manages to defeat and dispirit the most favorably disposed reader in exactly the same way that the editorial laxity of the *New York Times*, Salisbury's longtime employer, ultimately overcomes one's initial admiration for its journalistic competence. Much as a dog and its master are said to grow more alike as the years pass, Salisbury has become a faithful reflection of the *New York Times*.

Like the *New York Times*, Salisbury is gorged with vanity; his title is apparently intended to let us know that the journey "for our times" is the life of Harrison E.

Mr. Mason is an attorney in Chicago.

Salisbury as written by Harrison E. Salisbury. In the course of his account Salisbury refers to himself far more frequently than even Julius Caesar did; his model in this regard seems to have been Benvenuto Cellini. His writing improves when he is not discussing himself; unfortunately, vast stretches of his book are crammed with tedious personal minutiae.

But as Boswell's *Life of Johnson* proved, a vain man is not precluded from writing an extraordinary book. Thus, any claims for *A Journey for Our Times* must ultimately rest on its descriptions of the Soviet Union; if Salisbury cannot satisfy here, he assuredly will not do so anywhere else. During his coverage of the Soviet Union for United Press and, later, for the *New York Times*, he became more or less intimately acquainted with a considerable number of important personalities in Soviet politics and culture. In addition, he has written both history (*The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad* and *Black Night, White Snow*) and fiction (*The Northern Palmyra Affair* and *The Gates of Hell*) with skill and sympathy for Russia and the Russians.

Lenin and Stalin. His posture was not unlike that of John Foster Dulles, who used to boast of keeping a copy of Stalin's *Problems of Leninism* on his desk, as though that were a key to what was happening in Moscow. I must confess that I have never read *Problems of Leninism* and never expect to.

If Salisbury had bothered to read *Problems of Leninism*, he would have found that it contains 28 articles and speeches written and delivered by Stalin between 1924 and 1939. Some of these materials are absolutely essential as a "key to what was happening in Moscow." For example, Stalin reported to the Seventeenth Party Congress that during the agricultural "reorganization" period between 1929 and 1933 (i.e., the collectivization war against the peasantry), the number of horses declined from 34.0 million to 16.6 million head, "large cattle" from 68.1 million to 38.6 million, sheep and goats from 147.2 million to 50.6 million, and pigs from 20.9 million to 12.2 million. Anyone reading those figures, and realizing that the cause of the decline was wholesale livestock slaughter by desperate peasants ("intense kulak agitation for the slaughter of livestock"), could not possibly have denied the existence of the famine that swept the Soviet Union in the early 1930's (as Salisbury's predecessor, Duranty, and other foreign observers did). Many of the materials in *Problems of Leninism* were not just a "key" to what was happening in Moscow, but were important events in their own right. In his December 1929 speech "Concerning Questions of Agrarian Policy in the U.S.S.R.," for example, Stalin announced: "We have passed from the policy of *restricting* the exploiting tendencies of the kulaks to the policy of *eliminating* the kulaks as a class." Geller and Nekrich, in their history of the Soviet Union, describe the cataclysmic human consequences as follows:

The following sixty-five days shook the country to a far greater degree than the ten days in October, 1917

which 'shook the world.' In nine weeks the foundations of existence for more than 130 million Soviet peasants were devastated, the character of the state's economy was altered—utterly demolished—and the character of the state itself was changed. (M. Geller & A. Nekrich, *Utopia u Vlasti [Utopia in Power]*, London: 1982, Vol. I, p. 247.)

Problems of Leninism not only reeks with the ghastly qualities of Stalinism (a

characteristic also of *History of the C.P.S.U. (B) Short Course*), but also embodies the abiding characteristics of Bolshevik rhetoric. A loyal Soviet citizen even today, if reproached about the lack of opposition political parties in the U.S.S.R., would undoubtedly say the same thing that Stalin did in his speech "On the Draft Constitution":

As to freedom for various political parties, we adhere to somewhat different

LIBERAL CULTURE

Profundities

The opinion that Norman Mailer made it by virtue of his own hubris (chutzpah?) would seem a questionable assertion to those who have not been nourished on the New York schlock that is presented to the rest of America as "literature" and "criticism." An inspiring example of how that system works was provided recently by *Parade*, an organ of pop liberalism for the lowbrow. In that feature, conceived as an interview (sort of), Mr. Mailer matches his giant intellect against that of Clint Eastwood, a lanky Hollywood archetype of the post-Gary Cooper American:

MAILER: Does the question of moral responsibility weigh on you?

EASTWOOD: How do you mean?

MAILER: You can have arguments whether Dirty Harry reforms more criminals than he stimulates.

EASTWOOD: I never feel any moral problems with these pictures. I felt they're fantasy.

MAILER: Come on. In Sudden Impact [Mr. Eastwood's latest movie], three men are shot in the groin by a woman. It's possible that some man or woman out there who never thought of doing that before, may now.

In a novelistic pastiche from the early 1970's, Norman Mailer is assassinated by a gunshot in the rectum. An image of being done in in such an unsavory way appears to be haunting him even after all these years. That obsession seems to obscure the above issue, on which both dis-



cussants spout trivia. Portraying violence in the arts can be praised as condemnation, condemned as stimulation, and dismissed as "fantasy." However, those identifications of the problem are trite. What about the connection between morality and a sense of shock? Where is the point at which naturalism in the arts makes the worst cruelty commonplace, omnipresent in culture, wearing down the very notion of thrill and reducing it as a component of social ethics? Where does crime connect with the buildup of human sensitivities—the gist of civilization? Somehow, Messrs. Mailer and Eastwood have remarkably little to say on that subject. □

views. A party is a part of a class, its most advanced part. Several parties, and consequently, freedom for parties, can exist only in a society in which there are antagonistic classes whose interests are mutually hostile and irreconcilable. . . . But in the U.S.S.R. there are no longer such classes. . . . In the U.S.S.R. there are only two classes, workers and peasants, whose interests—far from being mutually hostile—are, of the contrary, friendly. Hence, there is no ground in the U.S.S.R. for the existence of several parties, and, consequently, for freedom for these parties. In the U.S.S.R. only one party can exist, the Communist Party, which courageously defends the interests of the workers and peasants to the very end. And that it defends the interests of these classes not at all badly, of that there can hardly be any doubt. (*Loud applause.*)

There speaks the perpetual Bolshevik. By ignoring such material (and boasting of his ignorance, to boot), Salisbury is in the position of a tennis player who ties his racket firmly to one foot before striding onto the court; he should not be surprised if he has trouble returning the ball. And in fact Salisbury repeatedly admits that in analyzing Soviet affairs he “missed the point entirely,” “did not read” premonitory signs “correctly,” “never discovered” the reason for the arrival of a Chinese delegation in August 1952, and “failed to draw what seems to

me now the obvious conclusion” that just before his death Stalin was moving to destroy Beria. He even records that until as late as mid-January 1953 he “felt pretty certain” that Stalin was not planning a “new purge” despite the appearance of the customary Bolshevik warning signs (“tough declarations about party discipline and tougher ones on ‘vigilance’”) and despite the apparently almost tangible sense of menace (Svetlana Alliluyeva would later recall that “during the winter of 1952-1953 the darkness thickened beyond all endurance”). Salisbury plows on. His ignorance of Bolshevik theory makes him an easy mark for what Soviet émigrés—who presumably know at least as much as Salisbury does about the U.S.S.R.—call the “primitive” notion that Soviet behavior can be explained solely in terms of Russian history. As Salisbury puts it (the emphasis is his):

I read a lot of Russian history—*Russian* history, not *Soviet* history—in those long evenings in the Metropol. This told me how closely Stalin fitted the historical pattern of the eternal Russian drive for warm water (Constantinople, the Persian Gulf), in the passion for dominating the Balkans (shared with Nicholas I and Alexander III), in a wish for Far Eastern dominance (shared with Nicholas II), in a consciousness of British (now Indian) rivalry in Central Asia, in a love-hate relationship with Germany (shared with a

hierarchy of Czarist rulers and foreign ministers).

Salisbury is at best only half right; a “drive for warm water” may be an element in Russian history, but it is Marxism-Leninism that drives the Soviet Union toward the “warm water” of the Caribbean (including Cienfuegos, the warm-water port long coveted by such Czars as Nikita, Leonid I, and Yuri the Terrible). The whole pseudosophisticated hypothesis (which is usually advanced to show that the proponent is familiar with a smattering of Russian history and thus superior to those who merely listen to what the Bolshevik leaders actually say) has been succinctly harpooned by Vladimir Bukovsky:

It gets worse and worse. Treaties are not observed. Soviet expansion grows stronger; more and more countries fall victim to it. But even this is no cause for alarm since the main thing, the experts tell us, is to leave the Soviets an ‘avenue of retreat’ and give them a chance to ‘save face.’ Even while the war is proceeding at full speed and the Afghan people are still fighting back, Western politicians race each other to Moscow in order to save their own faces. It’s not so much that an entire nation has disappeared from the map that concerns them, as the possibility that détente might be undermined. Invade Afghanistan? Why, it’s only the ‘Russian tradition,’ the eternal drive ‘to warm water.’ And besides, they’re probably frozen, poor boys, and simply want to warm up a bit. Nobody would have gotten so upset, the specialists grumble, if only our Russian friends had sent Cubans instead. (Vladimir Bukovsky, *Pis'ma Russkogo Puteshestvennika [Letters of a Russian Traveller]*, New York: 1981, p. 248-49.)

As a memoir of a competent journalist’s daily experiences in often unusual surroundings, Salisbury’s book possesses some merit; as an attempt to analyze Soviet behavior, it is as hopelessly simplistic as the editorial page of the *New York Times* itself. □

In the Mail

***No Woman is an Island* by Michael Ivens; Villiers Publications Ltd.; London, England.** Beginnings, endings, desire, satiety, parents, children, birth, death: rendered in numbers.

***Freedom and Morality: A Nonsubjective Moral Code* by Michael Anselme; Philosophical Library; New York.** A French businessman-turned-philosopher maintains that doing one’s duty should be put above claiming one’s rights. There is still hope for France.

***The Freedom of Religious Expression in the Public High Schools* by John W. Whitehead; Crossway Books; Westchester, IL.** Arguments about why God, not silence, belongs in the classroom.

***The Writing on the Wall: An Anthology of Contemporary Czech Literature* edited by Antonin Liehm and Peter Kussi; Karz-Cohl; New York.** Writing that exhibits a sense of the knife edge of reality.

Fiction for a Flat Earth

Françoise Sagan: *The Painted Lady*;
E. P. Dutton; New York.

by Robert C. Steensma

St. Cyril of Jerusalem is reported to have told his catechumens that "The dragon sits by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass by the dragon." In addition to such spiritual leaders, writers of many persuasions have for centuries reminded their readers of the presence of evil and the eternal dimension of the human dilemma. Whether in the realistic, romantic, or satiric mode, the man or woman of letters has constantly been concerned with the significance of life and spirit. The writer can be Cervantes following the idealistic Quixote or Shakespeare writing about the anguished Lear and the implication will be basically the same: human actions have an importance beyond the immediate, a meaning far above the trivialities of the moment.

Modern fiction, however, has increasingly been devoid of such a moral perspective. All too often, contemporary novels are populated by thinly drawn sideshow curiosities who jump through a series of social and sexual hoops, all directed by an authorial ringmaster taking his bows in front of an enraptured audience of academics and journalists who act as shills to invite the book-buying rubes into the tent of the literarily initiated, where Norman Mailer, Erica Jong, Joyce Carol Oates, John Irving, Raymond Carver, and others go through their routines. The readers have been bamboozled into thinking that they have encountered the dragon, but they have really only looked at a freak.

A case in point is Françoise Sagan, who, almost three decades ago, at age 19, gave a

war-weary generation a delicious shudder or two and made herself a darling of the Sunday supplements with the publication of *Bonjour Tristesse*, her first novel, which sold a million copies in its first year. *Bonjour Tristesse* tells the story of a naive twit of 17 whose father has a perverse compulsion to tell her all about his sexual adventures. When he decides to marry one of his mistresses (to whom his daughter is also strongly attracted), the girl breaks up the marriage, and the lover dies in an auto accident. The book is as thin in plot, theme, and characterization as it is in size.

"*The Painted Lady* is more than entertaining; its verve and humor disguise a serious work."

—Time

In this first novel Sagan established the hallmarks which were to characterize her fiction: static and pointless plots, meager characterization, overtones of perversion and decadence, and a weary nihilism. When she appeared on the literary scene, there were those who expected a great deal from her. They were to be deeply disappointed. "I haven't often been taken seriously, and it's understandable," she has complained, "but it should be realized that it was difficult in 1954 (my hour of glory) for me to choose between the two roles offered me: scandalous writer or conventional young girl." Apparently she never decided what she wanted to be, and the indecision has stunted her growth as a writer; she has never matured into an artist.

The Painted Lady is Sagan's twelfth novel and her eleventh rewriting of *Bonjour Tristesse*. Having found a slick commercial formula so early in her career, she has pretty much exhausted its potential. In *A Certain Smile*, her second book, she develops an affair between a young student and a tired middle-aged man whom the girl sees as a kind of father figure; in *Aimez-vous Brahms?* there's a young man who falls in love with a busi-

nessman's aging mistress; in other novels, including *La Chamade*, *The Wonderful Clouds*, *The Heart-Keeper*, and *Scars on the Soul*, the characters, themes, and plots all seem to be drawn from the same bin of interchangeable parts. The ennui and decadence of these people give them no "basic reason for living, which, if they really think about it, is no more than an intake of breath, the flutter of a pulse, and now and then a moment's ecstasy at the contemplation of a garden, a person, or a plan, however ridiculous." Or, as with the main characters in *La Chamade*, "a day could not die when they were not

obliged to admit to themselves, again and again, that nothing else was true; nothing had value except the moment they were living then." Sagan's characters are rootless, shallow, two-dimensional; with little of any real value in their lives, they drift from lover to lover, from thrill to thrill (mostly sexual) without pleasure, understanding, or meaning. The world is a place in which love and the other virtues are futile, and hence relief from the ache of existence can be found only in trivia. Sagan's work is permeated with the philosophical weariness that pervades so much of late-20th-century literature.

The sins of the earlier novels are liberally visited upon *The Painted Lady*. In this story 10 jet-setters start out on a 10-day round-trip cruise from Cannes to Palma on a pleasure liner aptly named *Narcissus*. These are the "chic, elegant people" among a "boatload of octogenarians, of snobs and would-be aesthetes." This herd of hedonists is shepherded by a captain whose outstanding trait is his "singular inaptitude for navigation," and his purser, a homosexual whose greatest moment in life occurred at Capri on another voyage when, "dressed as a gypsy

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maiden," he danced "the cha-cha-cha with a muscular Capriot."

The passengers on *Narcissus* represent a circle of fools who embody the collective follies of mankind, a technique Sagan has clumsily borrowed from a long tradition beginning with Sebastian Brant's *Das Narrenschiff* (*The Ship of Fools*, 1494) down to Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools* (1962). There is an aging conductor for whom sex is just an agonizing memory, now confronted by his former paramour, a sexual predator and opera star on the sunset side of 50, "a woman famed not only for her extraordinary voice and the art with which she used it but also for her taste for scandal, for men, her scorn for gossip, and her excesses, her rages, her extravagance, her manias, her charm." We also meet a sugar baron, who is really a "heap of living ash," and his bland wife. Among the rest are the owner (through a rich father-in-law) of a chic leftist periodical and a "cashmere Communist . . . who had never been cold, hungry, or thirsty." His wife is "the painted lady" of 32, a decadent heiress with "a face already grotesquely thick and gleaming with make-up; for this diffident upper-class lady painted herself like a whore and, according to the gossip columns, she also drank like a fish, drugged herself like a Chinaman and was, in short, systematically destroying herself and her marriage." Two other curiosities are a befuddled filmmaker and his latest find, a moral frappé who is touted as the "hope of the French cinema." This circle of moral vacuities is completed by a young French gigolo who has "to watch his waistline, take some calcium, have that incisor straightened, and give his always-fragile blond hair a light shampoo," and an Australian swindler posing as an art appraiser.

Having given us this cast of lotus-eaters, Sagan does almost nothing with them. We are turned back and forth from one grouping of people to another in a series of episodes rarely connected in any coherent manner. These characters do very little except drink, flirt, listen

idly to the music of the conductor and the opera singer, talk about love and life and art and all that, lounge in their deck chairs, and go to bed, always with their neuroses and sometimes with each other. When they try to think, they produce only intellectual cotton candy, as when the title character says that "the meaning of life was there in that inviolable innocence of the human being, in the accepted but fleeting course of life, in the merciful inevitability of death, in something else which for her was not God, but about which at this precise moment she felt just as certain as those who apparently believed in the existence of God." Or the filmmaker, bored with his frothy starlet and feeling that his career is stymied, talks about art in banalities: "he felt an immense hunger and a vast humility toward these towering peaks of Art, living monuments, these fabulous treasures he had neither the time nor the opportunity to discover. He felt starved for literature, for painting, for music. Finally everything seemed infinitely desirable to him, for it was only to the extent they could be realized that [he] gave way to his desires. . . . For [him], the Pantheon and its illustrious dead had finally reached a level of prestige com-



parable to United Artists and its cops."

And this is about as far as things go. These caricatures do nothing more than scratch their anxieties and pick the scabs of their memories. Even the painted lady, who tries to escape the emptiness of her husband's fashionable Marxism, finds no excitement in contemplating a divorce and a romantic flight with the swindler. The gigolo is taunted out of the singer's bed, commits suicide, and leaves behind him only the unrequited sexual hunger of the pursuer. The singer blithely heads for concerts in New York, totally unconcerned with her abasement of others. The degeneracy of these people, Sagan seems to be saying, is emblematic of a larger world for which there is no possible redemption. None of these characters has any spiritual sources to draw upon as they move in their sex- and money-obsessed world. Life is a rotten deal, and the only way to escape is through sex or perversion. The lack of values in Sagan's fictional world is best demonstrated by a woman's callous comment in *La Châmaïde* as she contemplates an abortion: "a child ties one down terribly, you know."

Perhaps the problem is that Sagan, like so many modern writers, doesn't really know what she wants to do or where she stands philosophically. Her characters are ripe for satire; they have vices and foibles which would make a Johnson, a Swift, or a Waugh reach quickly for his pen. But she seems to like her people too much, and she cannot subject them to ridicule. Perhaps she has fallen into the same condition she has noted in other modern novelists: "they play with blank cartridges, defused grenades, leaving to their readers to create for themselves characters left undelineated between neutral words, while they, the authors, openly wash their hands of them. . . . Give me a Balzac, who weeps over his heroines, his tears falling into his coffee, or give me a Proust, who in his obsession with detail leaves no room for development." In the same book (*Scars on the Soul*), she unwittingly describes her own work: "It isn't literature, it isn't a true confession, it's someone

tapping away at her typewriter because she's afraid of herself and the typewriter and the mornings and the evenings and everything else. And of other people."

Sagan really has little to say to the serious reader. Having subordinated content to style, she has become nothing more than a mannerist who believes, as she says elsewhere, "I shall live badly if I do not write; I shall write badly if I do not live." Style, of course, is hard to judge in translation, but Sagan is quite capable of the most cloying preciousness: "The Mediterranean gave off an overwhelming sensuous romanticism, at once pitiless but flawlessly mild. It clasped the hips of the *Narcissus*, nudging and flattering, and the soft, incessant pressure of its warm waves was insistent enough to

sway her the breadth of a millimeter, enough to make her twenty thousand tons whimper with pleasure." No wonder E. P. Dutton bound the book in purple cloth and gave it a dust jacket of the same hue.

For 20 years now, it has been literarily chic to babble about the death of the novel, a cliché given some credence by the work of Sagan and some of her contemporaries. If the novel is dead, it died because it lacks the compassion and tolerance, the moral insights and humane perceptions that have given purpose to the literary tradition. Such fiction gives its readers no weapons with which to ward off the dragon but defused grenades and blank cartridges. □

Small is Significant

Walter Walker: *A Dime to Dance By*; Harper & Row; New York.

Geoffrey Norman: *Midnight Water*; E. P. Dutton; New York.

by Gary S. Vasilash

Existence—which is all there is, to answer Peggy Lee—consists of little things: there was only one Big Bang, and should there be another, none will be around to record it. The charge of the writer (or the painter, sculptor, etc.) is to organize a series of little things in such a way that they are not merely *there* (i.e., a counterfeit realism passing itself off as a one-to-one correspondence with reality), but so that they betoken, announce, hint at, matter, signify: *mean* something. Thus, while there may be admirable qualities to a technical report or some similar form, the purpose of which is to convey data, the transcendent value of such is null. The little things must be informed, not simply given form. The specimens do

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not fully exist when outlined only with regard to geometrical figure and mass. Being comes through values.

One of the problems of (and so with) many modern writers is that they have absolutely nothing to say, yet they are certain of the importance of their saying it. Thus, they present works which say nothing, which is not to be confused with the Nothing (*néant*) spoken by Samuel Beckett. In some cases, these writers have more than a rudimentary grasp on English composition. But in this they are not unlike those who fill practice sheets with calligraphy: those neat rows are attractive, yet they are merely finger exercises. One of the reasons why this situation prevails is that many of these writers have experienced nothing—and are far from Nothing. They are like those boulevard Marxists who dress down when dressing up and who *know* all about "the workers" though they have never done any manual labor. All of the posturing and postulations may have the correct forms, but their relationship to the way that things are is tangential. The writers and their works are hollow. A criticism that is often leveled at new writers is that

Fleeting Truths

A gentleman with impeccable leftist credentials, Mr. Todd Gitlin:

Journalism is a memory hole. In the perpetual present of the press, nothing is older than old news.

We agree. What's even worse is that both American liberals and conservatives have a pernicious tendency to confuse history (life's teacher) with old news (most often valueless trivia). □

their world is circumscribed by the literal and/or figurative walls of the academy. They write books about books, stories of writers trying to write. This is nothing new.* Indeed, it is so old that the air in those confines is becoming exhausted. But this hermetic situation isn't the whole problem; the argument is not that one must go out into the world to become a profound writer. If this were so, then we'd look to janitors, dishwashers, and the like for powerful works, and even the Soviets have learned (the hard way) that this isn't exactly the correct direction. Profundity comes from the soul. Valuable writing, as its root indicates, requires values. And a fine handling of little things. Cases in point come from two first-time novelists, men who have careers outside of the academy. One is Walter Walker, a lawyer. The other is Geoffrey Norman, columnist of the "Outdoors" department for *Esquire*. Both stick to their own turf. *A Dime to Dance By* concerns a lawyer in a small town in Massachusetts; *Midnight Water* deals with those who make adventurous runs up

*Note: And established writers do it, too. For example, an excerpt from Philip Roth's *The Anatomy Lesson* that appears in *Vanity Fair* (September 1983) opens as follows: "Gone. Mother, father, brother, birthplace, subject, health, hair—according to the critic Milton Appel, his talent too . . . In *Inquiry*, the Jewish cultural monthly that fifteen years earlier had published Zuckerman's first stories, Milton Appel had unleashed an attack upon Zuckerman's career that made Macduff's assault upon Macbeth look almost lackadaisical." *Vanity Fair* pays well, so if that's what they're buying . . .

the Gulf Coast of Florida with drugs in the holds of their ships. That is where the similarities cease. Walker, through a gritty story, proves himself to be sensitive and sensible, aware of the little things that make up quotidian existence and of the values that help give that existence spirit and reason. Norman, for all that he offers in prose that is certainly readable, might as well have gone deep-sea fishing instead of writing *Midnight Water*; it is devoid of any significance beyond that which the author himself might experience.

Walker's is a first-person narrative told by a semiworldly man who is a small-town man by choice and inclination. He could have undoubtedly made it in nearby Boston, but he preferred not to. He is more comfortable in his hometown, where all of his old buddies—most of whom never left because of their limited attempts at going anywhere—still meet to discuss the Red Sox over drafts. He is not an underachiever or a failure, just a man who is trying to make sense of

his life, which is no small task. Moreover, he tacitly acknowledges that he has an obligation to find that meaning, not only for himself, but because he is the father of a teenaged daughter whom he hopes will eventually address the same issues in her own life. He is a man who realizes that there are a few chances, opportunities, available in any given life, and that the selection of one closes off at least another. Certainly everybody *knows* that (or claims that he does), but he *thinks* about the ramifications and the permutations that result from making selections. He must, for example, explain to his 16-year-old daughter why she shouldn't elope with a no-account punk beyond just saying that "he's a loser." He feels somehow obliged to put life into some kind of perspective or order for his beer-drinking buddies, who tend not to see beyond the next glass. As he says to one of them who whines about the life he imagines he could have had:

'Hey . . . knock it off, will you? You wanted to get noticed fifteen years

ago, you should have lost a hundred pounds and become a halfback. You wanted to go on to school, you should have read a few books instead of trying to memorize *My Three Sons*, or whatever it is you used to watch all the time.'

He is no sob sister, for he adds, "I'm not going to feel guilty over you . . . I got my own problems." His daughter, friends, ex-wife, and self are all part of his problems, which are not things that he considers in the sense of having final solutions, but as constituting life. Perhaps one of the reasons why he is not an aggressive lawyer on the outlook for cases is that he recognizes that there are limits to the number of things that an individual can deal with. If this book were the product of the academy, the lawyer would undoubtedly dwell on navel lint. Walker, however, is more of a realist than a short-pants absurdist; his lawyer works. And as a lawyer with a bit of moral fiber, he recognizes the problematic—if not absurd—nature of American justice. He ponders a difficult—almost airtight—case against him—case:

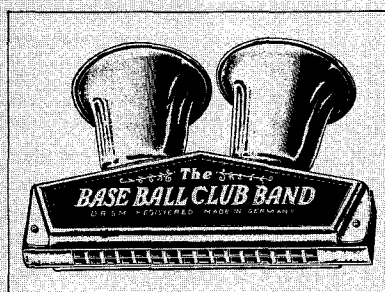
[W]asn't there something more I could do to establish Richie's innocence? Out in San Francisco, somebody had practically gotten away with killing the mayor and a city supervisor by arguing that he had eaten too many Twinkies and that they had made him temporarily insane. Could I establish a diminished-capacity defense in Massachusetts on the basis of all the junk food Richie had eaten at the Burger Pit over the course of his life? No, it wouldn't work. Under that test all the jurors, the judge, the bailiff, the court reporter, the attorneys on both sides—everybody would prove just as demented.

That, as it is, is the real world. It is a world of legalities and Twinkies, of getting ahead and *My Three Sons*. It is not a place that permits the novelist to close with a "and he lived happily ever after," nor is it a place that bespeaks the eternal torments as described by Dante—and faked by

LIBERAL CULTURE

Out in Left Field

During the 1960's activist Tom Hayden kept in shape by carrying banners for miles in campus and convention demonstrations against the wicked Establishment. But having redirected his undiminished ideological zeal into the less physically strenuous activities of electoral politics, this champion of the working class now finds other ways to flex his photogenic muscles. Recently Mr. Hayden paid \$2,395 plus air fare to join a small group of Los Angeles Dodgers fans in a week of simulated spring training at the Dodgers' training camp in Vero Beach, Florida. The price for a week of sunshine and calisthenics may put it a bit out of reach for the sweaty proles Mr. Hayden professes to represent, but his wife, Jane Fonda, thinks they've found a bargain. In



a statement to the press, she said that she "fully supports" her husband's decision to participate in the Florida training because "it's less expensive than seeing a psychiatrist." Exactly what inexpensive treatments Mr. Hayden's batting instructors use for cases of megalomania, grandiose delusions, and terminal adolescence were not disclosed. □

those writers who have yet to learn how to lace their shoes. Walker knows a world that many do, one wherein the struggles are more akin to those of the Little Engine that Could than to those of a kvetching Sisyphus; they are small but real and meaningful. His diminution is provocative, not petty.

Geoffrey Norman's reduction is as significant as that achieved through a TV diet-exercise show. The elements of *Midnight Water* are exciting, in the sense of action, much more so than those of *A Dime to Dance By*. However, while little literature comes from those who spend their lives in closets, less comes from outdoorsmen who pretend to be Papa Hemingway. In place of Walker's beer-drinking pals, waitresses, and petty politicians, Norman offers drug runners, women who "party" at all the right places and in all the "in" ways, and mercenaries. But Norman doesn't want to present a story that could be serialized in a men's magazine with a picture of a deer on the cover; he wants to be profound. Striving for profundity is an act that has laid many writers—and readers—low. Complicating matters for Norman is the fact that he bases his approach on a petty nihilism. The titles of both novels come from passages in the books. In Walker's, a character who thinks that he has "made it" because he has made money selling drugs says to the lawyer:

'You're jealous, aren't you? Here you were, the big hot shit in high school while I was just another nobody. And now we're all grown up and you're the one who's a nobody, just some guy slaving away for a living. You only had one dime to put in the jukebox, didn't you, man? When your song ended you had to start dancing to somebody else's music.'

The jukebox is an apt metaphor that tells of the life of little things, of those existences wherein emotions are provoked when it can be uttered, "They're playing our song." Pushing the wrong combination of buttons or a skip in the

record can be painful. Life is more often like Woolworth's than I. Magnin. Norman doesn't realize this. His protagonist, who has essentially no feelings for people other than himself (he quit his job and left his wife because they were cramping his style), neglects the jukebox and pretends to an appreciation of Wagner. It is painfully foolish. After musing a panegyric to John Kennedy, the man continues:

He wondered if young men these days paid any attention to the example of John Kennedy's little brother who had found himself in midnight water with a chance to be brave and had failed so badly and publicly. *The whole thing was sad.*

A man who feels melancholy about the perpetrator and not the victim at Chapquiddick is evidently lacking values on any scale, small or grand. Moreover, Norman, perhaps unwittingly (for the reader is, I think, supposed to identify with the protagonist), undercuts those ill-directed feelings as well as any

reasons that a reader may have to look for some sort of meaning from the base and center of the novel. The protagonist's philosophy is encapsulated in a phrase that's regularly repeated: "Nothing special." For example: "He had tried and the marriage had failed. An ordinary story. Nothing special." In another scene he thinks about all of the sailors—"Thousands, stretching back through the generations"—who have died at sea, "All of which made him feel like nothing very special. He took a deep breath and said it aloud. 'Nothing special.'" Virtually anything can be falsely justified on the basis of that notion, which brutalizes the meaning of man, which novelists are supposed to address. At one point the subject of reincarnation comes up and the protagonist is asked *who* he would be if he had a choice. He answers: "Nothing human . . . Maybe a bird." There is little human about him; he is not a *who* but a *what*. Perhaps Geoffrey Norman should stick to wildlife and leave the matters of man to those who willingly confront those concerns. □

Myths, Visions, Passions

Martin Seymour-Smith: *Robert Graves: His Life and Work*; Holt, Rinehart & Winston; New York.

Douglas Archibald: *Yeats*; Syracuse University Press; Syracuse, NY.

by David Hallman

Although the era of "High Modernism" is well in the past, the pantheon of modern literature still seems to many a palace of confusions. The paradoxes and contradictions, the conflicting impulses that informed the art and shaped the modern sensibility are still being assessed by those who would make sense of that sensibility. It may be that the history

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which finally emerges will simply be a record of confusions: the quest for traditions in a literature marked by experiment and revolt against the past; the impulse to social and political authority in an age of democratic mass culture; the search for order and belief in a culture that sold its soul for the dubious rewards of the scientific Weltanschauung; the difficulty of the art itself. But for those who wish to understand, the lives of the writers themselves, especially when used to gloss their art, offer instructive lessons on those shaping forces that lie under the surface of our publicly shared culture. While it may be true that biography is one of the mortician's arts, a telltale sign that the embalming process has begun, we must still look to biographies for our most intimate knowledge of history. The best, of course, are the auto-

biographies that lie in the creations of the artists themselves, intellectual and spiritual records of their physical and existential histories. The best formal biographies, as well, must try to illuminate that more profound life with the conflicts and often humdrum details of day-to-day existence. If the spate of recent literary biographies is any indication, the taking stock has begun.

In that pantheon mentioned above, few major poets have been so inadequately studied and discussed as Robert Graves, while only a handful of giants have been treated so exhaustively—to excess some, including Graves, would say—as William Butler Yeats. On the face of it, the poets seem to share a common ground. Both were born—Yeats more intimately so—into Anglo-Irish families with some artistic traditions. Both were among the most prolific of modern writers, and both persevered in careers of astonishing longevity. Yeats and Graves shared a hatred of modern science; both found the consequences of scientific philosophy repugnant and, as a result, became soured on orthodox religion to the extent that they found paganlike substitutes in symbolic mythology. Both Yeats and Graves had their eccentricities, to put it mildly, and both suffered—almost willfully—their most embarrassing and notorious humiliations at the hands of women. Both poets sustained a remarkably passionate lyricism in their verse until the ends of their careers, and both were inspired by a mystical concept of the poetic process and of poetry as a higher truth. At this point, though, the comparison breaks down.

As a critic of his fellow poets, Robert Graves has characteristically insisted on his own tastes without regard to fashion. He has, with perverse delight, put himself outside the mainstream of modernist reverences and played critical gadfly to the establishment. For instance, he used the 1954-55 Clark Lectures at Cambridge University to throw his scorn at such modern demigods as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, and

especially Yeats, for whom he has harbored a lifetime of “loathing” as a poet. Yeats, he says, began with “admirable qualities for a beginner”—he had “wit, industry, a flexible mind, a good ear, and the gift of falling romantically in love”—but while he would have liked to have become a “folk” poet in the manner of the American Vachel Lindsay[!] he “lacked Lindsay’s simple courage.” In the 1920’s, after his exposure to Pound’s ideas on modernist poetry, Yeats emerged, “well-groomed, cynical, . . . with a manly voice, florid gestures . . . a new technique, but nothing to say.” From Graves’s biographer, Martin Seymour-Smith, we learn that barely two weeks after Yeats’s death in January 1939, Graves and some friends “had a lunch ‘in honour of demise of Yeats.’” The reason for the blind animosity is not clear unless Yeats—like Auden—was perceived as untrue to Graves’s ideal, a “false poet” whose “poetic truths” were contrived.

Robert Graves was born into a prosperous upper-middle-class background, the sort that has produced so much of the enduring in modern British literature. His progress through public schools and Oxford left some psychological scars but gave him the classical educa-



tion that lies behind most of his subsequent work. The Great War of 1914-1918 provided his rites of passage into manhood for which the British schoolboy playing fields had prepared him, and one of his most popular and enduring books is the “autobiography” written before the age of 35, *Goodbye to All That*. The wartime adventures were real—he endured the trenches, was gassed and pronounced dead—but the war also threw him into those trenches with others of the generation of 1914, including Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen. After the war, Graves began his serious literary career and—not coincidentally—entered the first of a bizarre series of romantic involvements which reveal much about his writing. Even before he articulated them for himself, he seemed inspired by the ideas of Goddess and Muse as the feminine and moving forces behind culture. The Goddess was the primal, matriarchal object of human worship; the Muse the nymph-like inspiration for creative labor. Graves often has had trouble separating the two ideals when they appear in fleshly forms, and almost his entire career has developed in response to his various romantic entanglements.

Shortly after the war, Graves plunged naively and blindly into marriage with a shallow young artist and feminist who produced four children for him but who seemed to hamstring his other creative drives. In the late 1920’s, though, he encountered the American poet Laura Riding, a strange, grotesque figure who dominates much of Seymour-Smith’s biography, and who is herself the most notorious “event” in Graves’s life. In Seymour-Smith’s account, Riding emerges as an original “American Gothic” whose putative attractions remain invisible. A New Yorker by birth, she had married a professor at the University of Louisville, and then had insinuated herself into the close-knit Vanderbilt Fugitive group of poets, both—and this was no mean feat—as the only Yankee and the only woman to cross that line.

Any discussion of Laura Riding’s career

must be handled with some delicacy. For reasons that are inexplicable from either her photographs or her poetry, Riding exercised a magnetic appeal to certain personalities that has given her a legendary stature out of proportion to her artistic achievements. But she cannot be dismissed simply as the archetypal Other Woman. Although married at the time, Riding apparently descended on the Nashville group with all the liberated instincts of a jazz-age flapper, and with her own designs on some of the leading Fugitives. Seymour-Smith frankly discusses an affair with Allen Tate (Tate once described Riding to me as "the most predatory woman" he had ever known), but after the Fugitives disbanded as a formal group she contrived again to insinuate herself most intimately into the life of another writer. Graves was a willing victim.

Riding had entered Graves's life in 1926 as his secretary to live and travel with Graves, his wife, and his children. She quickly became his muse and collaborator, composing with him the important early *Survey of Modernist Poetry* and living openly with him on the Spanish island of Mallorca. Their sexual liaison ended abruptly in 1929 when Riding attempted suicide by drinking Lysol and stepping out of a fourth story window, with Graves descending a story to follow her plunge from the third floor. Both survived, although Riding was seriously injured, and their emotional relationship continued until the late 1930's when she left Graves for the obscure American poet Schyler Jackson. Graves turned to Beryl Hodge, the much younger wife of one of his closest friends, and has lived happily with her in Mallorca, comforted additionally by a succession of young "muses," since the end of World War II.

The story is as revealing of Graves's career as it is bizarre in its outline. Aside from the popular historical novels which have been so successfully produced for television, Graves is perhaps best known for his studies in mythology, especially his romanticization of the White Goddess as the archetypal female figure who

lies behind creative inspiration and indeed all human productivity. His thesis, which calls for masculine subjection to the female principle, was acted out dramatically in Graves's own life. From his feminist first wife, through Riding, Beryl, and the nubile inspirations of his late career, he has lived his philosophy, finding both support and domination in his consorts and loves. Graves has always denigrated the art of fiction—even his own novels—and has insisted on his eminence as a poet. If his reputation does ultimately survive as a poet, it will probably rest on a remarkable group of love poems which bear testimony to his worship of the Goddess and her retinue of attendant muses.

So much has been written about the biography and works of Yeats that little detail is necessary here. It will suffice to say that Douglas Archibald's *Yeats* is an exemplary application of the biographical method to literary criticism. Unlike Seymour-Smith's biography of Graves, Archibald's book is a traditional academic study which deftly uses the facts of Yeats's life to illuminate the poetry. The influence of his strong, artistic father, the intense milieu of Irish nationalism, his involvement in both the Irish literary renaissance early in the century and later in Irish politics per se, his notorious unrequited love for the fanatical Irish patriot Maude Gonne, and his ventures into the occult are all admirably described and then revealed in their poetic forms. One particular aspect of his career, though, makes for an interesting comparison to Graves.

Like the younger poet, Yeats was propelled by the emergence of science as the predominant philosophy of his world. And although comparatively unlearned (most of Yeats's esoteric knowledge derived from wildly self-indulgent and undisciplined reading), he also turned to mythology as a panacea for his philosophical complaint. In his *Autobiography* Yeats discusses the problem of his peculiar need for some intellectual authority, and in so doing touches the heart of the

philosophical and spiritual dilemma that both informs and plagues much of our greatest art:

I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only. I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tindall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters, with some help from philosophers and theologians. I wished for a world where I could discover this tradition perpetually . . . I had even created a dogma.

Yeats is describing here his need for belief, and his solutions—the "fardel of stories," etc.—are the early "Mythologies" drawn from Celtic lore, the bizarre occultism, and the complex symbolism which he elaborated in his curious prose work *A Vision* and then used as the symbolic foundation for some of his greatest poems: "Leda and the Swan," "Two Songs from a Play," the "Byzantium" poems, and the apocalyptic classic "The Second Coming." Cleanth Brooks has called *A Vision* "one of the most remarkable books of the last hundred years . . . the most ambitious attempt made by any poet of our time to set up a 'myth.'" To Seymour-Smith, who apparently shares Graves's prejudice, it is "extra unsophisticated . . . vulgar . . . clearly not the work of an educated and informed man . . . an embarrassment to Yeats's admirers." But while more accessible to readers, Graves's *White Goddess* is, by Seymour-Smith's own admission, based on dubious scholarship and can be taken seriously only as a "gigantic metaphor." As if that were not the effect of Yeats's myth. A comparison of poems inspired or derived from both books suggests that *A Vision*, however frustrating, is something other than an embarrassment. And of course both books must be read in the perspective of the poetic protest against the mechanistic, scientific impulse of the age.

Any account of these two biographies must consider their separate aims. Seymour-Smith has written an intimate biography of a close friend, and his book is aimed at a general reading public. Graves's life has been long and uncommonly full; it is the stuff of novels, but Seymour-Smith does not write that kind of compelling narrative. The development of his story is clumsy, and the style is often deadlly amateurish. By contrast, Archibald's academic study, while aimed at a narrower audience, is efficient and reads neatly. The book is clearly instructive about the poems. Criticism must be made about one point: Archibald's embarrassment by "the problem of Yeats's politics," the distrust of democracy and the attraction to authority which led Yeats into a flirtation with fascism from which he later withdrew. It is interesting to observe sophisticated critics, who are drawn naturally to the most powerful and seminal authors of the modern period, squirm when faced with the phenomenon of those authors' conservatism. That pantheon of modern literature I previously alluded to includes not only Yeats but Pound, Eliot, Faulkner, the Fugitives, and many others who have been castigated, dismissed, or abused for their conservative bent. Instead of complaining or apologizing, some astute critic may eventually grab the other horn of the dilemma and ask whether the conservative impulse—however extreme in some cases—may not be a source of actual strength and inspiration behind the best of the innovative and rebellious art of the age. That act of daring could open up a whole new theater of critical warfare.

Seymour-Smith's faults as a critic are more glaring: he is sometimes careless with facts, and this throws his critical judgments into question. Many of the errors are trivial. But such carelessness has marred his work before and supports the caution about his criticism I have suggested. One of his most extreme claims for Graves is his eminence as "the foremost love poet of this century—and

possibly the two preceding ones too." He adds that Graves continued to "produce a plethora of fervent and hot-blooded love poetry until he was eighty: something no other poet has done or tried to do." Well, in this comparison, the author is technically correct because Yeats died at the age of 74. But many critics have commented on the passion and lyrical beauty of Yeats's late work. One poem written only short months before the death of that "Wild Old Wicked Man" hints that he had not yet outlived his passions:

POLITICS

In our time the destiny of man pre-

sents its meaning in political terms.'

—Thomas Mann

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics?
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has read and thought
And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms.

Robert Graves, I believe, should be happy to have written that poem, at any time. □

Solipsism, Genius & Madness

Edward Albee: *An Interview and Essays*; Edited by Julian N. Wasserman; University of St. Thomas; Houston, TX.

Vladimir Nabokov: *Lectures on Don Quixote*; Edited by Fredson Bowers; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

by Dennis Q. McNerny

We often hear that language is under siege in America today, that it is being assailed on all sides by people who, either unwilling or unable to use it, are only too happy to abuse it. The observation is true enough, and we would be ill-advised to allow ourselves to become complacent about a very real phenomenon exercising a corrupting influence on our society. Once language breaks down and is no longer intended to *mean*, but becomes a vehicle by which people are enchanted into a state of intellectual stupor and so can be cynically manipulated and have their moral consciousness brutalized, then the noble game of civilization

is up.

In the Western tradition, the literary artists, those who have devoted their lives to the creative advancement of the word, have often been the most conscientious protectors of the integrity of language. They have kept language alive and lively by their deep-seated (and sometimes unconscious) commitment to it as depository and perpetuator of meaning. In the early decades of this century, however, something happened. Many writers underwent a profound change in their attitude toward and understanding of the very nature of language. They seemed somehow to lose heart. Instead of priding themselves on being the guardians of the sacred fire and doing everything in their power to keep it burning high and lucent, they seemed to take an almost perverse delight in dampening it. In their hands language became disoriented. It turned in upon itself. Instead of being a way to the real, a link between the mind and what stands outside the mind, language formed the habit of hermetically sealing itself up within the mind, and solipsistically setting itself up as an echoer of echoes.

The American playwright Edward

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Albee, most critics—with what often amounts to reverential unanimity—agree, is a writer very much concerned with language. This can be discerned from *Edward Albee: An Interview and Essays*, edited by Julian N. Wasserman. Furthermore, the consensus seems to be that Albee's concern for things linguistic and epistemological is happily redounding to the benefit of us all, if not always aesthetically, then at least ethically. Albee, among other brave souls whose altruism is presumably exceeded only by their perspicacity, is engaged in the admirable task of raising the consciousness of the American public, telling us things about ourselves and our society which otherwise we would not know.

We should be permitted to be skeptical about such claims. Certain things about the man and his work are unarguable enough. While on one level it is obvious that Albee is very much interested in language, and that this interest is reflected everywhere in his plays, on another level he is not interested in language at all. Or, to speak more precisely, he is interested in language but in the wrong sort of way. What is evident in the major portion of his plays are the sad effects of his misdirected concern. The first thing that needs to be said about most of Albee's plays is that they are not plays at all because they lack that without which a play cannot be a play: dramatic verve. They lack dramatic verve, in turn, not because there are too many words and not enough action, but because the words themselves lack action. The language in his plays has a self-defeating tendency not to reach out toward the real, but too often contents itself, in a daze of self-mesmerization, to revolve around and around itself, like a dog chasing its tail. Watching a dog chasing its tail can be amusing—for a very short time. Then one feels obliged to get on to more important things.

Perhaps Albee missed his true calling. He got off to at least an interesting start as a playwright; he showed promise. But then, instead of continuing to perfect

LIBERAL CULTURE

A Siskel

Under this title, we periodically take note of some strange occurrences in the pages of the *Chicago Tribune's* Tempo section; they are called movie reviews. Allegedly, there exists a person by the name Siskel, whose elucidations on movies are published there, but we somehow cannot believe that an authentic human being who was touched by primary education could have evolved into such a mixture of arrogance and mental aridity, and still be employed by any self-respecting daily. We suppose that—using the terminology of a recent futuristic movie—a Siskel must be a "replicant," artificially constructed by the *Trib's* ultra-archliberal left-wing faction, whom the publishers either do not control or do not read in print. He (it?) is by-lined as a "movie critic," and this is what he had to say about one Richard Pryor and his latest "concert" picture—that is, a one-man show—entitled *Richard Pryor—Here and Now*:

The result is another comedy triumph for Pryor and one of those rare films that actually make you laugh out loud, sometimes uncontrollably.

In our perhaps limited perception, Mr. Pryor is as funny as a urinal covered with graffiti composed by a retarded onanist. His comic force can be compared—if we stay within the sphere of plumbing metaphors—to a defective toilet which causes laughs when flushing, instead of bringing refuse down, pumps it up right onto the bathroom floor. His "wit" consists of spouting profanities in monotonous cadenzas. What he is saying is stuffed with such banality that one's brain shrivels. According to countless Siskels of this land he conveys the "black experience"; but the mere supposition of this is a grave insult to the memories of W. C. Handy, Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Langston Hughes, or Ralph Ellison. Of course, the Siskels claim that Mr. Pryor represents an updated black *savoir-vivre*, a "street-wisdom," an assertion that makes memories

of Abbott and Costello, or even The Three Stooges, seem like wistful dreams of charm and sophistication; Pryor's modernization is based on making juvenile cracks about the color diversity of private parts. To call him an actor, artist, or performer constitutes a slap at Sidney Poitier, Bill Cosby, Leslie Uggams. He is unable to articulate a mental or social condition other than through foul language, screams, or an obscene gesture. We once attempted to watch Pryor's cinematic routine, but we had to give up after 10 minutes: he struck us as a doleful microorganism who had renounced even instinctual groping toward a more developed mentality of a *Homo sapiens*. To be sure, there does exist primitive, naive, and folksy art (and wisdom), but Pryor is a fraudulent version of all of them, while the Siskels are unable to recognize the differentiation and claim he is passing judgment on humanity.

Certainly, the Siskel in question indulges in ratiocination:

The concert film was taped in August in front of a racially mixed audience at three sellout concerts in New Orleans.

What he is trying to say is that if there are enough idiots to enjoy idiocy, the latter transforms itself into a value. This kind of audience, according to him, delights in being debased and dehumanized:

In fact, some of the funniest moments in the film occur when Pryor shouts back at his audience, telling them basically to shut up in a variety of ways.

And on and on. The *Tribune's* own Siskel loves it when Mr. Pryor enacts (or maybe not?) vomiting on stage, and he climaxes in his highest worshipful laudation:

There is no more audacious performer around than Pryor. Who else would dare repeatedly to compare the president of the United States to his sex organ? No one.

This in a newspaper that every four years endorses someone for President. □

the difficult craft to which he had committed himself, he began to look at language in the wrong way. Rather than seeing it for what it is, a means, he began to regard it as an end in itself—not an unusual reaction of people who, for whatever reason, come to lose faith in the real, people who make a vocation out of doubting. That was one problem. Another, scarcely less serious one, was his succumbing to the most blatant kind of didacticism. In his later “plays” Albee has distanced himself from drama and is writing what amount to heavy-handed tracts. Might not Albee have been better off as a psychologist or a counselor? Or perhaps as a philosopher of the stripe of certain analytic types. He would have been right at home among those daring intellects whose notion of doing philosophy is to sit around wondering if it is possible to do philosophy.

There are some observers who consider Albee profound. By way of demonstration they point to some of the more opaque passages he has written—not to explicate those passages in any intelligible way, mind you, but simply to stand awestruck and mute before them. In a sense, their reaction is appropriate, for the inexplicable speaks for itself. But how can they determine Albee to be profound when they, apparently, cannot determine what he is talking about? It’s easy to be perceived as deep if one uses language as a barrier rather than a bridge. If the river of reality between two minds is impassable, our imagination can allow us, sometimes completely without warrant, to suppose that what is found on the opposite bank is important and valuable. The ultimate test of the worth of any writer is twofold: (1) Does he speak in order to be understood? (2) Does he speak the truth? Because Albee does not always qualify with respect to the first issue, it is difficult to advance an opinion on the second.

Vladimir Nabokov was a faithful guardian of the sacred fire. He was a genius of language, indicated, among other things, by the fact that he accepted

language on its own terms. The artist of language is someone who is fully cognizant of the basic truth that human beings are born into language, and he accepts the truth with equanimity. Nabokov never felt himself under compulsion to invent that which was already in his possession, and as a gift.

During the academic year 1950-51 Nabokov filled in for an absent regular and taught the Humanities 2 course at Harvard, part of the General Education requirement there. Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* was on the syllabus for that course; by way of preparing himself to discuss the novel, Nabokov wrote a series of formal lectures, made some interesting diagrams and sketches, and, most impressively, composed detailed chapter-by-chapter notes on the entire work. The material has been collected and edited by Fredson Bowers.

The manner in which Nabokov approached this project is an edifying object lesson for all who are in the business of teaching and criticizing literature. What too many would-be critics forget as they launch out into the deeps of explication and analysis is the most important prerequisite for the process: a thorough knowledge of the text. It’s a safe bet that when Nabokov took the podium to talk about *Don Quixote* there was very little anyone could tell him about the work he didn’t know. Obviously one cannot talk intelligently about what one doesn’t know, yet it is amazing how many bold people are willing to hold forth on the subject of literature with only the scantiest knowledge of what they are talking about, with the predictable result that many unintelligent things are constantly being said about literature. What underpins Nabokov’s meticulous, thorough approach to *Don Quixote* is the foundation of all good criticism, appreciation. At first blush, appreciation seems not all that weighty a matter, but in fact it is the sine qua non, for without a basic respect for the work before him and a concession to the work’s essential seriousness (the work should be assumed innocent in this respect until proven

guilty), the critic, good intentions notwithstanding, is not going to come up with a worthwhile critical response.

To nurture a first-line appreciation of and respect for a given work of literature does not presuppose a favorable response to it. It *does* guarantee that the response will be honest, considered, and based on criteria to which all have access. Ideally, criticism is not unlike a scientific endeavor in the sense that its conclusions are not whimsical but based on solid evidence—the text. There is no denying the value of Nabokov’s conclusions in response to *Don Quixote*. For Guy Davenport those conclusions constitute not only a new reading of the work but “an event in modern criticism.”

Nabokov does not allow himself to be stunned into disingenuous responses by reason of the fact that he’s dealing with a “classic.” So he avoids the tiresome tack of simply elaborating on the conventional responses to the work. He will grant that *Don Quixote* rates consideration as a landmark, in that it stands as effectively the opening work in the tradition of the European novel. Too, he grants the pricelessness of the work because it gave birth to one of the great characters of modern literature. He is not at all impressed, however, by the structure of the novel; in fact, noting its looseness and at times almost haphazard quality, he quite refuses to go along with the idea that it is one of the great novels of world literature. But his most pointed criticism has to do with what he frankly calls the “brutality of the book.” From the viewpoint of the book’s cruelty, which he discusses in pointed fashion, it is for him “one of the most bitter and barbarous books ever penned.” *Don Quixote* is simply not funny, and of Sancho Panza the same can be said but more emphatically. Nabokov seems to imply that if consciences can be corrupt so too can senses of humor, and anyone who would consider to be funny the pathetic condition of *Don Quixote*, and the systematic cruelty to which he is subjected in the various episodes of the tale, would have

to be suffering from a seriously impaired sense of humor. This judgment is so sound, so cleanly correct, that one is puzzled over why, seemingly, it has never been arrived at before. Maybe it takes a genius to detect the faults of a genius. Nabokov is variously amused and miffed by the many critics who have seen fit to call this a humane, sensitive, and humorous book. It is, he says, nothing of the sort.

However, Nabokov favors, even admires, Don Quixote. He sees him as a pathetic character, to be sure, for his helplessness in the face of the grand delusion that leads him painfully from pillar to post, but, for all that, he takes Don Quixote as someone who is possessed of an essential dignity, a nobility, as a man who manifests a basic—albeit bizarre—brand of integrity. Also, according to Nabokov, Don Quixote is a man of courage. At this point, admittedly a minor one, I balk. What counts towards Don Quixote's courage, in Nabokov's estimate, is often activity which is simply crazy. He wants to praise him for behavior which is essentially irresponsible. Nabokov would have done well here to recall Aristotle's sound notion that true courage stands at the middle point between cowardice and foolhardiness. Don Quixote is certainly not a coward, but admitting as much should not be tantamount to claiming that he is a courageous man, for he certainly is not one. If the world were liberally endowed by people who showed his kind of "courage," we would all be in deep trouble. The most elemental of facts about Don Quixote which has to be remembered is that the man was mad. Nabokov was perfectly aware of this fact, of course—most of the time. But in his sentimental regard for Don Quixote he allows himself to forget the sad state that the erratic knight errant was in, except for occasional brief periods of lucidity, throughout the tale. His forgetting it while considering the matter of the knight's courage led to his completely misconstruing the quality of that courage. Given the fact of Don Quixote's madness, the question to be

asked, then, is this: Can a madman display true courage? The answer to the question is No. A madman, by definition, is unable to discriminate. Thus, fools rush in . . .

Related to Nabokov's misconception about Don Quixote's courage is another of his reactions, equally odd, to the antics of the Knight of the Mournful Countenance. As already noted, Nabokov sees Cervantes's masterwork as being pervaded by cruelty. But he displays a disconcerting inconsistency in this matter. He stresses, fittingly so, the manifold cruelty to which Don Quixote is subjected, but he has a blind spot for the

cruelty that Don Quixote perpetrates. Cruelty is cruelty, and this benighted knight can give as well as he can take. It does no good to try to get him off the hook of ultimate responsibility for his actions by calling attention to the fact that he is deluded. We cannot forget and remember the man's madness selectively. Nabokov, in his reluctance to acknowledge the cruelty of the madman from La Mancha, would seem to be falling into an old but peculiarly seductive trap: distinguishing between "their" cruelty (bad) and "our" cruelty (good). The world has suffered much from that specious distinction. □

Constructive Criticism—Sometimes

Sidney Hook: *Marxism and Beyond*; Rowman and Littlefield; Totowa, NJ.

by Alan J. Levine

Sidney Hook's latest book is largely a collection of previously printed articles and reviews; but it is nevertheless another interesting contribution to American intellectual life and a worthy companion to such works as *Political Power and Personal Freedom*. Hook remains an astute observer and an unrepentant democratic socialist—with a decided emphasis on the "democratic." *Marxism and Beyond* examines the history of Marx's thought, its distortion of and impact on American life, Solzhenitsyn, and the contemporary communist threat.

Hook remains a staunch defender of the "orthodox," the traditional Social Democratic interpretation of Marx's thought. For Hook, Kautsky, and Plekhanov, and not their Leninist enemies, were the true heirs of Marx: Marx was a decent, basically democratic thinker, closer to anarchism than to totalitarianism. Marx's hopes for a stateless society without division of labor were utopian

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and the predictions based on "scientific socialism" have almost all been disproved. Marxism is obsolete, and "to go beyond Marx," Hook comments, "is not a form of apostasy but of development required by the recognition of the pluralistic factors at work in history." For those who pretend that Marx's predictions were correct, or try to resurrect Marxism by ignoring Marx's claims that his work was susceptible to scientific proof—and therefore disproof—Hook is scornful. To the totalitarians' misuse of Marx, Hook is still violently hostile.

Hook's view of Marx may be overkind. All of his claims to scientific validity notwithstanding, Marx was not above cooking the books for propaganda purposes. His literary transformation of the Paris Commune into a heroic socialist uprising in *The Civil War in France* is a case in point. But Hook is a clear expounder of ideas. His chapter "Marxism: A Synoptic Exposition" is one of the best short accounts of Marxist thought. It and other chapters are especially valuable for their dissection of what Hooks dubs "spectral Marxism," the adaptation, or assembly, of odd doctrines using Karl Marx as a false front: "What passes for Marxism today is largely a mélange of doctrines that differ from Marx's leading ideas and

that he would have scornfully disowned for all their sentimental socialist fervor." Hook dissects the "existentialist," Frankfurt (Marcusean), and other schools of "Marxism" which base themselves not on what Marx considered his lifework, but on his 1844 "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," whose ideas he specifically repudiated, or on even more arcane sources. While Marx's actual views have been demolished by events and the march of social science, he remains, absurdly enough, important. As Hook notes sardonically, "The discovery of the social problem by phenomenologists, neo-Thomists, positivists, and even linguistic analysts, usually results in an attempted synthesis between Marx and some outstanding philosophical figure who has very little in common with him." The misinterpretations of Marx by George Lukács, Robert Heilbroner, and Michael Harrington are each shot down. Most of these fancies suggest that everyone in Marx's lifetime or immediately after it misunderstood him; not until Lenin, Lukács, or someone else read Marx was the thought of the man *truly* understood. This line of thought has reached a culmination in Michael Harrington's claim that Marx *misunderstood himself*!

Perhaps of greater interest, and urgency, are Hook's chapters on communism and the contemporary situa-

tion. Hook, a veteran of the political warfare among American intellectuals from the 1930's to the present, is able to make acute observations about American communism and its long-term effects. Among other things, he stresses to a highly unfashionable degree the influence of American communists on the intellectual life of the 30's—American communism was, he notes, primarily a small movement of lower- and middle-class intellectuals and professionals. Yet, it was able to "dominate the cultural life of the country" for a time in the 30's. Hook, perhaps optimistically, stresses the "idealistic" appeals of communism at that time; he discounts the views of those who stress the greed for power, the hope of being a member of a prospective ruling stratum, as a source of communist appeal in that era. This favorable interpretation of their motives, however, does not make him less condemnatory of the "spiritual degradation and Byzantine servility" of intellectual apologists for the Soviets—or the eyewash recently produced to apologize for them, notably, Malcolm Cowley's disingenuous memoirs and David Caute's slickly dishonest book, *The Great Fear*. Hook sadly concludes his analysis of the communist impact on American intellectual life by noting that "the disillusioned fellow-traveling intellectuals have bequeathed anti-American intellectuals." "Today, by and large," he

maintains, "the mainstream of American intellectuals is either indifferent to the challenge of the Communist world to the relatively free world of the West or hostile to the very conception of such a challenge as a manifestation of Cold War sentiment."

Hook's view of the world situation is not optimistic. Eschewing an examination of the military balance, he remarks that "the morale of Western Europe and its psychological readiness to resist aggression . . . are at a very low ebb." Noting the bravery displayed by the Berliners in 1948, he glumly comments, "there is very little of that spirit left." With his characteristic courage to look unpleasant facts in the face and to describe them, he bluntly views détente as appeasement. While contemptuous of the folly of our allies, he concludes that the United States is most responsible for the current mess. Our endorsement of détente was the signal for the West's abandonment of sensible Cold War policies—though, he notes, the change was welcomed by the Western Europeans. Unlike many neo-conservatives and conservatives, however, Hook is not afraid to see that "the containment policy has not been successful," that there was always something seriously wrong with the Western policies of the 40's and 50's. Hook's sally "In Defense of the Cold War" is a clear, brief discussion of the contemporary world situation: only one point in his analysis is hard to agree with. Hook offers the strange argument that Watergate had more to do with America's national demoralization and the decline of our military power in the 1970's than Vietnam did. It is hard to accept this notion; our military decline began in the late 1960's when the Johnson Administration underestimated the Soviets' will and ability to increase their power, and gave Vietnam priority over other military needs. The demoralizing impact of Watergate has been vastly exaggerated. Vietnam, or the prevalent image of that war, had already destroyed American morale. And Watergate, in any case, could have disillusioned people only if it had discredited



a leader who was immensely popular, like FDR or Eisenhower, or who was the sort of man who is respected even by his political enemies, like Adlai Stevenson or Robert Taft. Obviously, Nixon fits neither of those categories.

Nonetheless, both war and subjugation can still be avoided, Hook insists. The alternative is not "either Red or dead," but "neither Red *nor* dead." Actually, as the careers of Stalin and Pol Pot show, in many cases it is a matter of first Red, then dead.

The last portion of the book is one many conservative readers may find less appetizing. It is a closely reasoned defense of social democracy, the mixed economy, and the 20th-century liberal outlook against conservative criticisms—what Hook deems to be a futile attempt to resurrect the very limited "watchman" state of the 19th-century. En route, Hook bluntly lets fly with a few truths that libertarians may find uncomfortable, noting that freedom is not a natural state. Hook also tries to refute the insistence of Solzhenitsyn and many conservative thinkers that morality and ethics must

rest on a religious basis. Unlike much left-of-center comment on conservatism, Hook's approach is not a dismissal of his opponents as a bunch of blind, stupid fanatics. It is, rather, an attempt to offer a different explanation by a man who shares much of the perception of reality of conservatives. Hook, too, condemns the absolutization of freedom, the arrogance and stupidity of the news media and the imperial judiciary, the proliferation of idiotic regulations, and, most of all, the West's "failure of nerve." He is ready to concede that some welfare-state measures he finds desirable may have to be sacrificed to the necessities of defense.

Hook's "critique of conservatism" perhaps applies more forcibly to libertarians, on one hand, and the New Right, on the other, than to regular conservatives and neoconservatives. It is, however, a useful analysis and so worth consulting. Its sole fault, in fact, is a negative one. Hook offers no real explanation for the West's decline and the "collapse of its morality." He is clearly anguished and puzzled by it, though he rightly does not despair. Still, without an explanation, the book suffers. □

Before the Borscht Belt—and Beyond

The Literary Humor of the Urban Northeast, 1830-1890; Edited by David E. E. Sloane; Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

Chicago's Public Wits; Edited by Kenny J. Williams and Bernard Duffey; Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge.

by Gregory Wolfe

It is a commonplace that humor arises from the amused recognition of the disparity between the ideal and the real. Inherent in this conception is the idea of

humor as a *mediator* of experience, something which literally puts us "in the middle" between extremes. From the sane, middle ground we can laugh at both the pretensions of idealism and the cynical attitude which goes under the name of realism. The vaudeville comedian who slips on a banana peel is funny because man is presumably an erect creature living in a world of uncertain surfaces. In Shakespeare the fool is "licensed" to prate and satirize, even at the king's expense, because mental debility places him outside normal human discourse and allows him, like Touchstone, to use his "wit as a stalking horse." True laughter is ultimately a form of ecstasy, in the sense that the Greek word *ekstasis* means "standing outside" of oneself. The 18th-century

wit John Gay distilled the essence of humor in his own wry epitaph: "Life is a jest, and all things shew it; I thought so once, but now I know it."

Humor mediates not only between real and ideal, but between past and present, the individual and the group, between different nations, ethnic communities, and social systems. Humor thus serves a crucial public function by defusing conflict and binding men together in a shared vision. When humor is put to private ends, or made to act as propaganda for an ideological mission, it loses its role as mediator, and community is fragmented.

The two volumes here are collections of American urban humor, primarily from the 19th century. Since early American comic writing was the child of the newspaper and magazine, these books gain value simply by making such widely scattered material accessible. But more importantly, they provide a needed corrective to the conventional idea that American humor has been predominantly that of the frontier and the camp meeting. While the Southwestern comedians were joking about the horse swap, urban writers were anatomizing the railroad. As editor David Sloane points out, Mark Twain is indiscriminately lumped into the Southwestern school when in fact his technique (if not his setting) is largely shaped by urban values. Twain was in many ways a Connecticut Yankee.

In places like Chicago and the Northeast, the Jeffersonian vision of a decentralized democracy of yeoman farmers quickly gave way to Hamilton's bustling commercial republic. The increasing role of economics as the mode in which men related to each other was taken up by humorists of both commercial and agrarian persuasion, so that the country bumpkin is ridiculed as much as the vulgar, urban nouveaux riches. The urban tradition of humor inherited the legacy of Congregational humanism and took religious truths for granted (unlike the more irreverent Western school), and they pursued a robust egalitarianism in which no classes or groups were exempt

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from attack. Above all, the urban humorists were characterized by a sophisticated sense of literary form which only a cosmopolitan, educated culture could support. Often their comic method was displayed in extravagant parody or burlesque, as in this version of "Jack and Jill" in the manner of Whitman: "Jack, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and merry/ Like the rocks prehistoric—gigantic. . . ." Or Mike Royko's modern version of Carl Sandburg's poem about Chicago: "Chicago/ Hi-Rise for the World . . . Dapper, slender, filter-tipped/ City of the Big Credit Card." More usual was a subtle, Yankee understatement, in which a low-key irony, like a pistol with a silencer, was the main weapon.

The earlier humor, however, was rarely deadly. Except for a brief period surrounding the Civil War, American humor remained largely in the jovial, ribbing manner of Horace, rather than the bitter satire of Juvenal. The persistent myth of America as the New Eden and Chosen Nation fueled the optimism of a buoyant commercial republic. On one level this was expressed in the expansive mysticism of Whitman. Among the comic writers P. T. Barnum triumphed as a self-proclaimed humbug thanks to his inventiveness in making bogus entertainment and his gleeful lack of con-

science in taking people's money. Few American humorists possessed Barnum's vulgarity, but many shared his confident individualism. Almost alone among American humor writers of this era stands Mark Twain, whose essentially Swiftian despair about the human condition gave a barely suppressed anarchic impulse to his fiction. What enabled Twain to avert nihilism and attain lasting art was the strength of his own federalist vision of order which, entwined with his Juvenalian bitterness, produced a highly creative tension.

In addition to the upheaval brought about by changing economic circumstances, the other pressing urban problem at the turn of the century was European immigration. This was the time of the xenophobic, unfunny ethnic joke, but the best humorists dissolved the growing paranoia. Perhaps the most impressive achievement of the American urban wits represented in these collections is their sheer linguistic energy, their ear for dialect and colloquial speech, and their ability to utilize dialect for seriocomic purposes. At a time when anti-immigrant feeling was high, comic writers created immensely popular ethnic characters, such as the German "Carl Pretzel" in Chicago, and his counterpart in New York, "Hans Breitmann." To modern ears, this dialect is difficult, but

for contemporaries it had an immediate relevance to common experience. By creating dialectal characters, humorists could make immigrants appealing and human, while using their foreign background and naiveté to help them satirize and comment on local and national issues.

The most enduring of the ethnic characters was Chicago's "Mr. Dooley," the Irish tavern proprietor from the Southside community of Bridgeport, written by Finley Peter Dunne. Mr. Dooley, like his fellow Irish, was a great talker, and in the tavern setting Dunne provides an ambience of leisure and reflection in which Dooley can utter his hard-nosed, commonsense wisdom. Some critics have noted that the Irish community represented by Dunne (along with the other ethnic groups) was breaking apart under the pressure of economic mobility even as the first Dooley columns were appearing. Even if Dunne wrote about a world that no longer existed, Mr. Dooley spoke with the authority of a community in time. It is one of the continuing American paradoxes that the ethnic communities, which at one time were perceived as inimical, have become objects of celebration and nostalgia (a function of the diversity in unity which the social scientists rather dubiously call "pluralism"). At a time when community was breaking down, Mr. Dooley spoke with the voice of a shared heritage, one fully committed to the American experiment.

Unlike the collection of Northeastern humor, *Chicago's Public Wits* continues through the 20th century. Unfortunately its editors do not adequately explain many of the social and intellectual changes which caused a metamorphosis in American urban humor. With the rise of trade unions, and later with the inception of the welfare state, the modern American city has become increasingly segmented. A growing alienation of the educated class (due to ideology) caused humorists to lose their confident "voice." As the editors of *Chicago's Public Wits* admit, the 20th-century comic writers spoke with a "superior" voice, eschew-

In the Mail

Rabbit in the Moon: Haiku by Raymond Roseliep; Alembic Press; Plainfield, IN; much of this/ is rather/pathetic.

Water Rights: Scarce Resource Allocation, Bureaucracy, and the Environment edited by Terry L. Anderson; Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research; San Francisco, CA. Soon, agricultural and industrial concerns in certain locales may find themselves "As idle as a painted ship/ Upon a painted ocean."

International Lending and the IMF edited by Allan H. Meltzer; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC. The selection of aims is shown to be more important than the proliferation of aid.

Crime and Justice: A Conservative Strategy by Frank Carrington; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC. Liberals have long formulated and executed policy in the area of criminal justice; the consequences are obvious (e.g., "Stick 'em up!"). Here's an answer. □

ing the perspective of the common man and criticizing any who did not live up to their standards. The flight of the middle class into the suburbs left the American city with the odd conjunction of welfare-state poor and hedonistic rich; the humorists, already dulled by ideology, found little in the city to inspire them. The mild Horatian humor which had become traditional, however, was abandoned not for sharp, Juvenalian satire, which depends on a strong moral vision, but for a bitter, directionless resentment, usually attributed to the machinations of "robber barons."

Much of this early-20th-century urban humor simply hasn't survived. The king of wits during this time was Will Rogers, a quintessential Midwesterner. In Chicago, the old mudslinging matches between the *Times* and the rumbustious *Tribune* gave way to the disputes of more isolated and self-important literary sets. Looking back on the squabble over James Joyce's *Ulysses* which Ben Hecht pursued against various antagonists, it is clear that Hecht was inspired more by his own taste than by the literary worth of Joyce's book. A few lone voices continue to speak from this period with an astringent humor. H. L. Mencken's acid wit was put to the defense of true culture, but he often mistook the enemies of civilization, as when he indiscriminately lumped the South into his "Sahara of the Bozart." Chicago was the starting point for Langston Hughes, who spoke for the urban Negro through his ability to convey authentic experience in fictional characters like Jesse B. Simple. Ring Lardner escaped from the casual nihilism of his contemporaries by mastering a literary genre in which farce and the grotesque combined in a discomfiting manner. Lardner influenced not only Hemingway but also Flannery O'Connor, who had her own ideas about the modern city.

What is the state of urban humor today? Since World War II, the development of new communications media makes comparison with the past prob-

lematic. Much of what was the demesne of the printed page has now become almost exclusively the possession of radio, television, and now the home video. The gains are obvious. Charles Kuralt can take his urban intellect "on the road" and cherish things like clotheslines and



odd-looking mailboxes with a particularity that only a camera can provide. Heywood Hale Broun can fill the TV screen with his personality. But Broun and Kuralt are of an older school of journalism. The losses of the new media are considerable. For instance, there is nothing in Andy Rooney's stints for *60 Minutes*—where he good-naturedly fiddles with boxes of Wheaties and Cap'n Crunch to poke fun at commercial hype—that couldn't be done more imaginatively in print. The screen lacks the subtlety of prose, which can dip in and out of parody or burlesque and wield the fragile weapon of irony. Television's characteristic failing is its tendency toward spoon-feeding, but a weekly dose of Andy Rooney is hardly a substitute for the craft of public humor.

In fact, it is difficult to speak of actual urban humor at present. *The New Yorker* was the heir apparent to the tradition, and John Updike's silken (hence flimsy)

urbanities have maintained it to some extent. The city today provides either evanescent fashions, which become tedious as satiric material, or raw sensuality and crime of lower- and upper-class varieties, which are too starkly decadent to laugh about. No wonder that the urban audience has turned out toward the so-called American "heartland" for its jollies. Garrison Keillor's radio show "Lake Wobegone" has served as an admirable vehicle for social and cultural commentary. What began as a local radio program centered around rural Minnesota life is now listened to by an overwhelmingly liberal, eastern, urban audience. In their Volvos equipped with elaborate sound systems, the liberals listen contentedly as Keillor gently mocks them.

The current split between town and country is also evident in Tom Wolfe. In his white suit Wolfe poses as the urban aesthete, but, as with Evelyn Waugh's loudly checked suits, Wolfe is really poking holes in the culture of his peers. It is the Wolfe of the highly artificial and sophisticated prose style who has gone out to the 'shine runners of Appalachia and to the fighter pilots and astronauts to find the "stuff" of which America is made, and which it is bent on denying. *Radical Chic* stands out as one of the few really adroit examples of recent urban humor.

The frenetic energy that has in the last few years thrown up structures like Detroit's Renaissance Center, which stands like a huge hypodermic needle vainly trying to inject life into the city, is not likely to bring about a lasting renewal. Those glass and concrete tubes and cones teeming with conventioners, holiday shoppers, and suburban fun-seekers may be the stuff of light comedy, but without real community the modern city cannot support what can only be called *serious* comedy. When public humor is either shallow, because liberalism is blind to real moral crisis, or cynical, because ideology fosters resentment, it ceases to mediate, to come between us and our fallen condition with the saving grace of laughter. □

COMMENDABLES

Original Thought & Triplicate Forms

George Roche: *America by the Throat: The Stranglehold of Federal Bureaucracy*; Devin-Adair; Old Greenwich, CT.

Edwin J. Feulner, Jr.: *Conservatives Stalk the House: The Republican Study Committee 1970-1982*; Green Hill; Ottawa, IL.

Conservatives come in at least two types: those who wish to conserve principles and those who wish to conserve things. Deeply committed to unwavering philosophic integrity, the first group recognizes the need for flexibility and innovativeness in giving their ideals the most effective expression in new political and cultural circumstances. Conservative thinkers of this sort, including T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, James Joyce, and T. E. Hulme, have achieved some of the most daring literary innovations in this century. The second group of conservatives, comfortable in some satisfying arrangement of things, little cares what wisdom must be violated in order to maintain the status quo. Members of this group we often call liberals. Indeed in recent years, as the failure of Federal programs in education, social reform, and economic security has grown increasingly obvious, those who engineered them have blithely discarded every tenet of reason and decency in order to protect these lucrative artifacts. Unable to dispute the dismal fact of a deteriorated social reality, liberal lawmakers conveniently forget the idealistic fervor with which

they originally announced the creation of tens of thousands of new government jobs as an unprecedented attack upon crime, poverty, and illiteracy. They explain to citizens weary of decades of seeing nothing successfully attacked but their paychecks that we mustn't increase unemployment by laying off public employees. Thus, the very existence of the jobs has become the primary, almost the only, defense invoked to justify their continuance. (Besides, public workers unitedly vote for liberals who resist tax-reducing change.)

In *America by the Throat*, George Roche's thorough study of bureaucracy, we see how the unthinking conservatism of liberals operates. Guided by no sense of functional purpose, only by a set of inflexible rules about how things should be ordered, our public servants have often become a public menace, when not an expensive public amusement. What's worse, these "conservatives" are supremely vigilant to see that their parasitic agencies are the things most fully conserved, regardless of what such "conservatism" does to American prosperity or liberty. Unfortunately, legislators who might do something about this problem usually only aggravate it by forever creating new bureaus and expanding existing ones.

The presence in Washington of such men as Edwin J. Feulner, Jr. does give some reason to hope, however. *Conservatives Stalk the House* explains how in 1973 Dr. Feulner and a group of far-

sighted congressmen, who shared the perception that conservative principles were taking a beating under the existing legislative order, established the Republican Study Committee. This new organization "succeeded in greatly altering the institutional framework of the U.S. House of Representatives" and consequently helped win unanticipated triumphs for conservative thought on such issues as welfare reform,

situs picketing, and land-use administration. The values of the Founding Fathers are as valid as they ever were, but in facing new political and social challenges contemporary conservatives of principle must demonstrate this kind of tactical inventiveness. As Henry Morley said about another astute conservative, Edmund Burke: "[He] changed his front, but he never changed his ground." (BC) □

Pilfering and Pondering 'Peace'

Leon Wieseltier: *Nuclear War, Nuclear Peace*; New Republic/Holt, Rinehart & Winston; New York.

Francis Schaeffer, Vladimir Bukovsky, and James Hitchcock: *Who Is For Peace?* Thomas Nelson; Nashville, TN.

No war has been officially declared and no American geography has been seized, but the peace has been broken. More precisely, *peace* has been stolen. In a brazen but brilliantly executed raid of expropriation, our most implacable foes neatly severed this word from its traditional, historical, and political significations and spirited it away from the shrines in Washington to the armories in Moscow, there to rework its semiotic substance. A replica of the word was, of course, returned to the District of Columbia and other Western provinces, but unlike the original (safely stored away with other Soviet trophies) the substitute was no longer the semantic property of free men. Instead of meaning "the harmonious expression of liberty, religion, and industry," *peace* now means "unilateral disarmament, acceptance of communist tyranny, and national self-immolation." Rather than a safeguard for the West, this piece of our vocabulary has thus become

a camouflage and a weapon for the Politbureau. Such pernicious theft and substitution would not have been possible if those charged with guarding cultural meaning, our writers and journalists, had been alert. But as their work in leading newspapers and telecasts testifies, most are nodding in liberal somnolence.

More wakeful than most liberals, Leon Wieseltier, senior editor of *The New Republic*, does recognize that *peace* has been misappropriated by those who use it to hide "philosophical exhaustion"; consequently, his discussion in *Nuclear War, Nuclear Peace* of the now-misleading "peace" label is insightful. But much more helpful in clarifying the Soviets' illicit influence on the rubric is Vladimir Bukovsky's essay in *Who Is For Peace?* With compelling evidence, this Russian dissident and refugee unmasks the ruthless thugs in the Kremlin and demonstrates how they cynically manipulate the pacifist dupes in the West willing to buy and resell a vocabulary of sparkling paste. His probing analysis deserves to be pondered by all politicians, commentators, and citizens who yearn for peace.

In arguing for a cold war deliberately kept cold, Wieseltier draws our attention in his book to another contemporary act of linguistic larceny, however.

Those who talk about "prevailing over" the Soviet Union in a nuclear exchange are not supporting "deterrence," though they say they are; they are talking about Armageddon. Yet Armageddon is not likely to be forestalled by the supernegotiators Wieseltier incredibly imagines negotiating with the communists before and *after* they have unleashed their first nuclear salvo. Indeed, when "deterrence" means only the cautionary promise of Mutually Assured Destruction, why should we zealously guard the word, as Wieseltier does, not only against those who fatuously believe that America could now survive the pushing of the button, but also against those who want to develop new antimissile technologies?

Why not open our dictionaries wide to any word-robber who can reattach this awful signifier to a workable laser or satellite system of defense?

The key to long-term peace without bondage, however, cannot be technological, but moral and spiritual, a point Wieseltier perceives, though obliquely. Evangelical theologian Francis Schaeffer and orthodox Catholic James Hitchcock look at the issue squarely in their essays in *Who Is For Peace?* Together they show that *peace* has become the plunder of totalitarian atheists largely because of religious uncertainty and unbelief among American laity and clergy. Surely, no word is safe when the Word is forgotten. (BC) □

IN FOCUS

Simpering for the Soviets

Derek Lambert: *The Red Dove*; Stein and Day; New York.

Anthony Olcott: *May Day in Magadan*; Bantam Books; New York.

by Peter Fripp

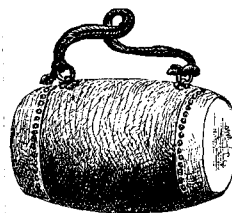
At a recent professional conference I had an informal discussion about world affairs with an editor of a metalworking trade journal. A constant concern in that industry, as in automotive, is foreign competition, especially Japanese. The gentleman is a middle-aged Midwesterner, a man who lives in a small town outside of a metropolis, who is undoubtedly a member of one or more civic organizations and an upstanding member of a local church. The Republican Party is

Mr. Fripp is a technical journalist in Detroit.

probably the one that he supports. By nature, and because of the demands of his vocation, he is a commonsensical, nuts-and-bolts sort of person—or at least seems to be. Doubt crept in as he began discussing his *bête noire*, the Japanese. He claims that they are a true diabolical enemy of the U.S., that they planned to lose the war in the Pacific—years before it began in 1941—so that they could get back at the U.S. through economic warfare today. Imagine: a conspiracy that converted the deaths of hundreds of thousands into a triumph of Sony TVs, Minolta cameras, Honda motorcycles, Yamazaki machining centers, and Toyota autos.

As the murder of 267 persons on the KAL jetliner had recently occurred, the conversation turned to that topic. The editor figuratively tugged at his braces and began a spiel about the greatness

of the Soviet Union, about how the people there have a vast, untapped potential that, if given the opportunity to be unleashed, will have salutary consequences for the rest of the world. He insisted that the U.S. must "understand" the Soviets, not be hostile toward them, for they have been, he claimed, always harassed. Some of his comments sounded as if they had been orchestrated for him by some grey functionary in the bowels of Moscow: Stalin's mass-murder is excusable because he was conducting a revolution; the domination of Poland is strategically necessary; the Soviets have no intention of ever using all of those SS-20's and other thermonuclear devices that they have so assiduously produced; the Korean passenger plane was justly shot down because it violated Soviet airspace. Andropov's ears were undoubtedly tingling with delight as the solid American citizen delineated the paragon of progress and possibility. I was suddenly imbued with fright as I realized that the man writes editorials on a monthly basis that end up in the offices of hundreds of manufacturing facilities of all levels of sophistication throughout the U.S., the shops, plants, and factories that are or can be called upon to produce the equipment that this



country needs to remain free—everything from tractors to cruise missiles. A few weeks after the conversation took place it was revealed that a man in Silicon Valley, who had access to top-secret defense details from a contractor shop of this sort, sold those plans to the Soviets for a paltry sum: he, too, is undoubtedly

a well-meaning dupe who wanted to assist a "great people."

The metalworking editor has probably not ever seen a copy of *The Nation*, and if he knows about *Mother Jones*, it's only because of the difficulties that it caused the Ford Motor Company. But it's likely that he'd read books like Derek Lambert's *The Red Dove*, a popular thriller, of sorts. Lambert draws crude cartoon characters, though he doesn't use a heavy line that provides a demarcation between black and white, good and evil. For him, all the players, whether they be American or Soviet, head of the CIA or of the KGB, are about the same. The American president's motives for maneuvering to capture the Soviet space shuttle—to ensure re-election—are put on par with the Soviet leader's intention for sending up the hypocritically named *Red Dove*—to mount an offensive weapon in space. Certainly, there is a qualitative difference between public relations and military strategy, but not in Lambert's book. A Soviet astronaut, the hero, comes off like a 1960's American rebel (i.e., one against "The System"), whereas a real-life counterpart is a piece of programmed, indoctrinated space freight. But the reader—a Western reader, for a book cannot be officially published in the Soviet Union if it questions the motives of the Politburo—can only conclude that the Soviet Union is really an okay place that has a few minor problems that will be eventually worked out since the people there are all essentially well-meaning.

Anthony Olcott is more realistic in *May Day in Magadan*, another popular book that deals with the U.S.S.R. Although his down-at-the-heels protagonist is a sympathetic character, it is because he is a hapless victim of an evil system, not a person resembling one's next-door neighbor, to say nothing of a national hero. Olcott's book is pervaded

with greyness, numbing cold, fatigue, sickness, shortages, duplicity, pettiness, impersonality. It is a murder mystery. Unlike many similar works that are set in the West, conventional pot-boilers, the unraveling doesn't occur because someone is interested in justice (a paramount concern of those ranging from Sherlock Holmes to Mike Hammer), but because the bureaucracy demands it: forms have been filed and so the procedure must be followed mechanically, even though most of those involved aren't particularly interested in the resolution. Those who are interested are attentive only in-

asmuch as it has an effect on their careers within the Party structure. Events are likened to the condition of a cheaply made sweater: once snagged, it will run down until it forms a pile of irregular wool.

In *The Red Dove* characters eat caviar; in *May Day in Magadan* a clean fork in a restaurant is like the Holy Grail. Olcott's book is "less exciting" than Lambert's, but it provides a better understanding of a portion of the status quo—the one that exists, even though it doesn't jibe with the views of the metalworking editor and most organizers of the nuclear-freeze movement. □

Cabals, Criminals, & Ghostbusters

Peter Reuter: *Disorganized Crime: The Economics of the Visible Hand*; MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Thomas Pynchon, especially in his *The Crying of Lot 49*, has put his finger on a modern mania that is often undiagnosed. While some reasons for this condition can be put forth that serve to justify it, it is more likely missed for the same reason that the proverbial woods in the trees are. That is, there isn't a gang of psychoanalysts that prevents the discussion of the modern mind-set that has it that there are cabals, leagues, societies, orders, squads, syndicates, guilds, unions, and various and sundry other secret confederacies behind the movement or manipulation of everything from mail service to the amount of vodka available at any given moment in history. The study of semiotics has undoubtedly taken off with a zoom because many people are already attuned to looking for signs and signals—be they newspaper typos or the arrangement of milk bottles left on a doorstep—that portend much more than common sense would

indicate. Junior Sherlock Sausures *know* that there are key signifiers out there, clues to some group of Moriartys, that are waiting to be tied up with their fitting signifieds. After all, these heirs to the Flat Earth Society maintain, the world is an awfully complex place, and it's unimaginable that it could function without some central masterminds lurking like puppeteers behind the scrim. Evidence to the contrary is automatically deemed inadmissible, dismissed with a comment shared by parapsychologists, UFOologists,



and their kin: "That's what *They* want us to believe."

It's hard to accept that governments, multinationals, and other large organizations—overt or

covert—are operated by people who have to cope with at least some aspects of quotidian reality (e.g., headaches, unruly children, air-traffic delays, etc. even if they are served by neurologists, nannies, Lear jets, etc.) like everyone else. It would be devastating for many people to discover that the grand systems that man has devised are fragile, that many



profound experts are merely apt. Peter Reuter goes in this direction in *Disorganized Crime* by claiming, on the basis of serious study, "that the Mafia may be a paper tiger, rationally reaping the returns from its reputation while no longer maintaining the forces that generated the reputation." Imagine! The Mafia, that grand shebang of secret societies, may not be the mover and shaker that it's conventionally (and comfortably) thought to be. As he examines bookmaking, the numbers, and loan sharking, Reuter points out that the organizational structures of the "markets" are such that central control, or the Mafia, is not a motive force. This is not to say that the Mafia doesn't exist, merely that the "families" do not exert an iron hand over market operations, though they can when it comes to providing what Reuter euphemistically calls "dispute settlement services." Reuter maintains that because organized crime was once dominant (such as during Prohibition) it is assumed to still be, so law enforcement officers go after the big mobsters and the newspapers and TV news programs make a big deal out of the arrest of people with monikers like "Joey the Monkeywrench." Meanwhile, as those spotlighted activities are going on, numerous small entrepreneurs are operating within the various illegal markets. And the markets work. □

Stylishly Abstruse

Roland Barthes: *The Fashion System*; Hill & Wang, New York.

Although New York, Milan, and Tokyo are making strong bids for eminence, Paris remains the couture fashion center of the world. All concerned eyes turn in its direction for the semiannual exhibits that set the de facto standards for what is acceptable and gracious, for what is Fashion. While some American designers, such as Perry Ellis, are setting styles, initiating trends, the general so-called "designer fashions" in the U.S. are essentially derivative from Parisian sources. Similarly, intellectual fashions have been—and are being—set in Paris. Students of modern culture must certainly look back to Voltaire and Rousseau, both of whom were once "fashions," sources of contemporary ideas and mores (to be *fashionable*, of course, does not mean to be *ephemeral*: some designs just won't go away, such as those limned by Jean-Jacques). In the post-World War II environment the French are at the fore. Names like Sartre and Camus are well established in both learned journals and college reading lists, and Levi-Strauss is known far beyond the circles wherein structural anthropology is discussed—and is not confused with blue jeans. Another name that emerged from this milieu: Roland Barthes. For the cognoscenti of intellectual fashion, Barthes is as passé as Pierre Cardin is to those who follow the sartorial scene. That is, Barthes's works on structuralism and semiology have been fairly well examined and co-opted or discarded at the leading American universities. They have moved beyond Barthes. While he's not quite at the level of the ready-to-wear rack, he is within the reach of a broader

segment of the American market: he is out of the boutique and into Bloomingdale's.

Structuralism and semiotics—Barthes's trademarks, just as a combination of initials are Saint Laurent's—are both rather abstruse subjects. Thus the fashionability of Roland Barthes in America today is, seemingly, problematic: few will purchase and wear extraordinarily outlandish garb even if it is the raging "thing"; mannequins can have a difficult time maneuvering once they are off of the runway. Barthes was very sensitive to such matters of taste; he recognized the matter of limits as perceived by the various social strata. In many of his early writings he is concerned with rather common, ordinary things, such as wrestling, steak, and the Eiffel Tower. Near the end of his career Barthes published *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, which is an examination of a person in love: the language the lover uses, the poses he strikes. These two portions of his work can be considered his Halston (pre-J.C. Penney Halston, that is) period: well executed and accessible. Between the two poles the more academic texts are found: one has to be very serious to take them on, just as one has to be very devoted to put something by Claude Montana on her back.

Fashion is taken very seriously in Paris. This helps account for its present preeminence (and the acknowledged existence of things by designers such as Montana). French intellectuals have been, are, and can be just as serious about fashion as they are about, say, the cinema. It is intellectually respectable. As Susan Sontag pointed out, Mallarmé edited a fashion magazine. (Arnold Bennett, a novelist who strongly admired the French, was once the editor of *Woman*.) The French attitude toward fashion helps account for Barthes's *The Fashion System*, which was orig-

inally published in Paris in 1967 as *Système de la mode*.

The text is simultaneously open and exclusive. It deals with a very tangible subject: the writing in two French fashion magazines during one year's time, 1958-59. However, Barthes performed an analysis on the material through semiotics, which puts the text out of the reach of even the most fashion-conscious readers, who would be better served by, say, *Elle*. That is, Barthes didn't explain why one thing is in fashion (e.g., the color blue; a linen dress) and another thing out (e.g., the color red; a wool skirt). "Fashion" is the given code, how the signs in code operate and so come to have meaning is what he looked at. His purpose was, it seems, to provide a

full working model of the semiotic activity, not a picture of the trends in clothing. Throughout *The Fashion System* there are various formulas; Barthes described one as a "half-verbal, half-algorithmic utterance." In what is something of an autobiography, *Roland Barthes*, Barthes wrote of his "taste for algorithms" and noted that he had "never worked out real algorithms." About his utterances that take that form he admitted, "Such figures, in fact, are of no use whatever." Similarly, *The Fashion System* is of no use to anyone except those persons who are interested in Barthes as semiotician, not Barthes as the latest Parisian fashion; it can be worn at campus watering holes, not at cocktail parties. □

Numbers Without Numbers

Dorothy Mermin: *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets*; Rutgers University Press; New Brunswick, NJ.

During the 165 years since all of Europe thrilled to the arch-Romanticism of Byron's *Childe Harold*, English-speaking poets have seen a general decline in their readership as the novel gradually replaced the poem as the dominant literary form. Certainly, the Victorian age, the period examined in Dr. Mermin's scholarly work, featured a number of fairly widely read poets, including Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Clough, and Meredith. Each of them wanted to express his personal perceptions just as sincerely as the Romantics, and yet each also dimly sensed that the epistemological subjectivism of Romanticism, though initially attractive, could not hold a large audience for poetry in the long run. Thus, in trying to develop a post-Romantic poetics, these five poets experimented with bring-

ing auditors into the poem with the speaker and allowing their presence to variously affect the content and tone of the verse. Through their efforts, Tennyson and Browning did succeed in winning sizable contemporary followings, but neither's work has aged well. The intellectual and moral vapidness beneath Tennyson's carefully wrought surfaces is obvious now even to sophomores, who rarely return to them after the obligatory survey course. And the muscular Christianity of *Saul* and "Prosperity," once the delight of the Browning Societies, seems irrelevant to a secularized society in which most readers do not reach for anything that *TV Guide* cannot grasp.

TV Guide does contain a few snippets of verse—chiefly advertising jingles—as do the programs it lists. But even if McDonald's publishes a variorum edition, "You Deserve a Break Today" will never recommend itself for aesthetic contemplation. Indeed,

S. I. Hayakawa has suggested that serious modern poetry is arcane and unpopular because all of the readily understood poetic diction and forms have been commercialized. While it is hard to think of a recent apostrophe to Nature that did not conclude with a pitch for a new condo development, this argument seems incomplete.

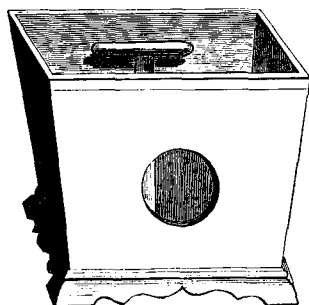
A more complete explanation for the waning of poetry can be gleaned from Dr. Mermin's discussion of Matthew Arnold, whose poems lamenting the impossibility of understanding oneself or of communicating with others did not command wide circulation during his lifetime, although he was sure they would eventually "have their turn." True enough, now that solipsistic despair is all the rage among academicians of literature, his bleak work has enjoyed a modest renaissance. But verse celebrating emptiness can never forge a large community of off-campus readers. As Dr. Mermin points out, only "mythic discourse undoes the separation of speaker and audience," and the solitary agnostic Arnold shared no such discourse with a Victorian world itself slipping into skepticism. Indeed, the use by critics of the adjective *mythic* when referring to pagan or Judeo-Christian systems of belief is itself symptomatic of the cultural vacuum. Technically a nonpejorative term signifying the suprarational, *mythic* is nonetheless still haunted by the connotations surrounding *mythical*: "We don't *really* believe this stuff." In societies possessing a sacred discourse accepted as fully true, Dante and Milton could voice their most intimate personal convictions in sublime and reasonably lucid verse, knowing that it would be met with a widely sympathetic public response. In the absence of such a metaphorical consensus, unbelieving poets have lapsed into the morbid confessionalism of a Plath or

the rarified aestheticism of a Stevens, while devout poets like Eliot had to devise tortuous ways of making themselves merely heard in a heathen age. Consequently, while Madison Avenue hucksters co-opt and degrade the conventions of accessible poetry, genuine poetic talent disappears into what Arnold appropriately called "The Buried Life." As Milton and Dante both knew, the only way out of such a grave is through Resurrection. (BC) □

Perceptibles

Hugh Bayless: *The Best Towns in America*; Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

A semanticist would have a field day with the title affixed to Mr. Bayless's efforts. The word "best" is one of the most subjective in the English language. And "town": What, exactly, are the definitive differences between town, village, municipality, city? (Hint: It isn't size; Chicago, the "Second City" is a "toddlin' town," and Skokie, officially a village, numbers well over 60,000.) The subtitle: "A Where-to-Go Guide for a Better Life." Disregarding



the subjective problems with "better" (better than what?), the question remains: Does the quality of one's life really depend on the location in which it is lived?

What is left are merely Mr. Bayless's preferences. He prefers a "population range of 25,000 to

100,000." He also prefers the warmer climes: of his 50 "best" towns, only six are in cold-weather areas (10 if northern California and western Oregon qualify as cold). There apparently is no place worth living in all of Washington, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, the Dakotas, Kansas, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the entire northeast portion of this country.

Life is whatever you make it—wherever you are. That's a worn-out truth, perhaps. But evidently it bears repeating—Mr. Bayless and his publisher don't know it yet.

* * *

David Sundelson: *Shakespeare's Restorations of the Father*; Rutgers University Press; New Brunswick, NJ.

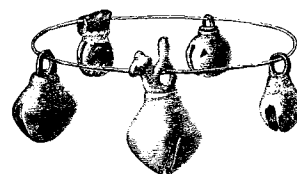
In recent years, the spectacle of militant feminism has often suggested histrionics rather than high drama. It looks as if Euripides' *Bacchae* has been enacted anew, closer to a farce, with thousands of women behaving like Agave and her sisterhood of revelers. After forsaking the hearth for the modern heights, these devotees to the rites of self-fulfillment are often as frenzied in their wrath as the Bacchanalian women, just as likely to mistake an approaching child as something nonhuman ("Product of Conception" has replaced "wild boar" as the common misnomer) and therefore just as likely to tear their offspring to bloody shreds while exclaiming, "Victory! Victory!" Sanely conservative in his social views, Shakespeare made a better ordered, beneficently patriarchal society his dramatic standard, violated at tremendous cost in the tragedies, as David Sundelson demonstrates, but at least partially realized in the comedies and histories. □

WASTE OF MONEY

An Empty Shell Game

A. P. Foulkes: *Literature and Propaganda*; Methuen; New York.

The cover of *Literature and Propaganda*, the proverbial warning notwithstanding is very telling about the book's contents and about how perverse the image of America is in the offices of Methuen. Indeed, the cover makes an impression with such a magnitude of force that it is difficult to take A. P. Foulkes's work with the seriousness that it would deserve if he, too, didn't succumb to ophthalmic difficulties when it comes to matters concerning capitalism in general and the U.S. in particular. First, the cover. It shows a rendition of Flagg's Uncle Sam, one that brings a word processor gone mad to mind. That



is, the image is composed of the letters forming the title repeated over and over again. Clearly, Uncle Sam is supposed to be the archpropagandist. In reality, he, or those whom he represents, are in the bush league as compared with Lenin or Goebbels, but reality doesn't get in the way of those whose avowed purpose it is to "demystify" things. In one sense, however, the old saw about a book and its cover is applicable here: only one chapter, a paean to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, deals with American

literature to any extent, and it seems to have been dropped into the book as a sop to American readers (i.e., Methuen's headquarters are in London). Still, the imperialist uncle threatens with his typographical index finger.

Chances are, A. P. Foulkes had nothing to do with the cover art. But he probably isn't disappointed in it—and is, perhaps, delighted with it—given the fact that he is busy ferreting out the "buried metaphors of capitalism" that pollute modern English and deform perceptions and feelings, noxious phrases like "cashing in" on a good situation and calling a popular entertainer a "hot property." Presumably, such coinages (oops!) make junior Shylocks out of one and all who use modern English for, as he points out in reference to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic determinism, "language does not reflect 'reality,' but creates it according to the structures and limits permitted by the language of a given culture," so if we're babbling about bullion all the time, we can't help but become blood-sucking members of the bourgeoisie. Even those who take care not to use the insidious formulations are caught if they know how to read. Professor Foulkes has an eye when it comes to spotting "capitalist integration literature" but is blind to panegyrics written about people's milling machines, concrete, and high-speed steel. Although he parades in Barthes, Eco, and other "hot properties" whose "stock is high in the literary marketplace" and "employs" illustrations show-

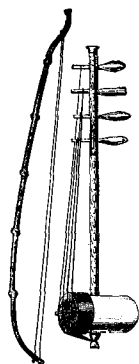
ing the dynamics of reading, his thesis is less revolutionary than all of this "excess freight" might imply. To wit: anyone who writes anything does so for a purpose. This is as true for the hack (party or mercenary) who wants to "cash in" as it is for the "producer" of bona fide literature. A wade through Professor Foulkes's book is a "stiff price to pay" for that "shop-worn" observation. To quote the character who must be a hero of users of modern English even though they might think the opposite, Iago, "Put money in thy purse." □

Misbegotten 'Conservatism'

Sol Gordon and Judith Gordon:
Raising a Child Conservatively in a Sexually Permissive World; Simon and Schuster, New York.

For more than two decades, *liberal* has been the proud badge of respectability and acceptance among those governing American academia, culture, and media. With growing public awareness of what liberal dogma has done to our chaotic schools, flaccid churches, disintegrating families, and our skyrocketing rates of crime, drug abuse, and teenage suicide, however, that label has lost some of its appeal. Consequently, a few liberals have stopped identifying themselves as such: *they're* not going to take the blame for all those teenagers slitting their wrists. Some liberals have even begun to call themselves "conservatives," while actually conserving nothing but the vacuum at the heart of value-neutral egalitarianism. Thus we have Sol Gordon and Judith Gordon, authors of an egregiously mistitled work justifying every conceivable sexual activity pleasing to the consenting adult who does not exploit others. Sneering

at the religious New Right for having "preempted the meaning of conservatism," they shame-



lessly pervert that meaning by redefining it around the thoroughly modern concept of "good self-esteem."

What Mr. and Mrs. Gordon prefer to ignore is that no conservatism, pious or secular, has ever made the self its center. The self, hopelessly fallible, finite, and mortal, *cannot* be conserved as a cultural standard, and should not be so elevated. What can be preserved, and against which conservatives have always insisted that the puny ego measure itself, are the truths discovered during centuries of religious devotion, intellectual research, and social stability. Such verities are cheerfully discarded by the Gordons, who pathologize "Victorian morality" and the traditional "authoritarian" family while legitimizing homosexuality and sodomy. Even when they reach the conservative conclusion that teenagers should not be "sexually active," the first reason they advance for their position is radically non-conservative: "They do not have ready access to contraception." And what can possibly be termed "conservative" in an interpretation of family violence as a by-product of traditional sex roles and of pornography as the result of too few public sex-education programs?

The Gordons' argument for frank discussions about sex between parents and children is

compelling, but their unqualified enthusiasm for sex education in the schools is less persuasive, especially in the context of their patronizing dismissal of religious teachings and their uncritical idealization of Sweden as a model of proper enlightenment. It seems impossible that the Gordons failed to note the dramatic upswing of venereal disease among young Swedish teenagers in the decades since Sweden made sex education compulsory, beginning in the first grade. But then, since the more severe forms of such diseases cause brain damage, a widespread epidemic might help more people accept their claim to be "conservative." (BC) □

Avarice and the Other Six

Richard Condon: *A Trembling Upon Rome;* G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

Upon learning that his *A Trembling Upon Rome* has been categorized as a "Waste of Money," Richard Condon will undoubtedly feel a momentary rush of pleasure (because of the reference to a medium of exchange), then launch into an overlong scenario about how it came to pass, one that will be chock-full of intrigue, doublecrossings, sex, financial manipulation on a world scale, sex, murders, more sex, and interlocking events that make a spider's web appear to be heavy-handed engineering. Condon, author of works including *The Manchurian Candidate*, made contemporary affairs as a series of plots within plots within plots his literary turf when Thomas Pynchon was still in short pants. Some, although kinky, are interesting exercises; *Winter Kills*, for example, is a rendition of the Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories which not only co-opts

the reigning ones, but does them one better. Unfortunately, Condon, with this, his 22nd book, seems to have become enthusiastically enamored of facts, figures, and moral perversions. The novel is a tabulation of events surrounding the Medicis (bankers are a favorite target for Condon) and the antipope John XXIII (picked, perhaps, rather than Benedict XIII because of his higher numeral, the highest in the Church until the bona fide John XXIII [1958-1963]). Typical of the approach in the novel is this rendering of a bit of local color:

[Snow] fell upon the thirty towers and gateways of the walled city of Konstanz, which had a population of six thousand people on the day Pope John XXIII entered the city. Two months later, by the end of the first week of January 1415, Konstanz had twenty thousand people; sixty thousand by the end of February the same year.

Lest any reader equipped with maps, a calculator, and a calendar have any doubts about the accuracy of this description or about the value of the vast numbers of gold coins that are bandied about (typically in the form of bribes), Condon appends a "Bibliographic Note" that lists works that can be consulted: "*I'm legit*," Condon tacitly insists.

Condon doesn't merely expose a man who apparently wore the cloth only for the sake of the collection plate and who preferred cavorting about beneath sheets; he renders the Church body as being cancerous through and through. Only a mind that sees all motives as being suspect and ultimately tainted by a rapacious selfishness could create such a blighted expanse that serves not to instruct or entertain, but only to denigrate. Suspicion has not merely laid Condon low; it has figuratively buried him. □

Goodbye, Peter Pan

***The Big Chill*; Directed by Lawrence Kasdan.**

by Stephen Macaulay

It is unique in that it has something for virtually everyone to hate. Consider the characters, all eight. They are the types of people that our parents warned us about in the late 60's and early 70's: not the drug pushers who lurked behind bushes, as they had been identified in the field guides drilled into us during primary and secondary school along with warnings about blasting caps on construction sites ("DON'T TOUCH"), but the college "radicals," those boys and girls with hearts so big and minds so empty. But the time is not 1969, it's 1983, and the place is not Ann Arbor, it's a demiplantation in South Carolina. And yes, the University of Michigan graduates have all grown up: they all pack blow-dryers in their luggage. And they have all (well, almost all) sold out. Two points are in order about the characters. First of all, if you're writing a screenplay about a reunion of people who went to the U. of M. in the late 60's, chances are you'll use ex-radicals, not ex-MBA candidates. *The Big Chill* isn't exactly scintillating, but a film about the young blood in the Chamber of Commerce would be the deep freeze, unless one of them happened to be a murderer or something. While it's fairly evident that Kasdan, who was part of the Ann Arbor milieu, has certain sympathies for those people, he is also adequately distanced so that he can poke gentle fun at them: one man starts a chain of jogging shoe stores that's called, borrowing a compound adjective once applied to American "imperialists," "Running Dog" shoe stores. Secondly, the former radicalism of the characters isn't of paramount importance; they all could have been members of the Y.A.F. Anyone in any time who has attended a reunion undoubtedly feels, for at least a moment, the difference between youth-

ful possibility and adult reality, the feeling that what one does for a living—even if one has "made it" in professional and economic terms—doesn't quite have the sparkle of a dream. One of the characters used to write for *The Michigan Daily*; now he jets hither and yon to interview celebrities and newsmakers, has the sort of job that young people can imagine only with awe: he is a writer for *People* magazine. Something is lost in the translation from the dream to the reality.

That translation is at the center of the film. The characters are brought together, almost in the manner of a well-made play, under somewhat forced circumstances. One of their former classmates, a man who showed promise in the field of physics but who dropped out in order to "find himself," and who ended up cutting his wrists in a bathtub, is the causal factor. No one really knows why he did it; reality was undoubtedly unappealing to him. What the characters never seem to recognize is that the world that they inhabit is one that they didn't inherit but one that they helped build. For example, one woman, who, like the others, is in her mid-thirties, initially decided that she would pursue her career as a lawyer

by being a big-city public defender. It *sounds* right to a young idealist. Once she starts doing it, she realizes that it means that she has to be on the side of those whom she quite correctly identifies as being "scum." She turns to real-estate law. Part of the life-style that she once lived and so promulgated included the notions of "free love" and "doing one's thing." She wants to have a baby; in her ears, the biological clock is not going tick-tick-tick, but Boom!-Boom!-Boom! The obvious difficulty is that she isn't married. A key reason for this is because the much-heralded sexual revolution has resulted in the mass production of men who have self-consuming ideas like wanting a commitment but not involvement. Another large portion, which can be readily spotted in any singles' bar in the country, while clean, snappily attired, and owners of 280-Z's and Firebirds, are not unlike—or at least have the appeal—of the clients in a public defender's office. The woman finds a solution to her baby-making, but she never seems to recognize the role she played in producing the problem.

The fact that Kasdan uses a tender prod and that his characters see through a glass partially are ultimately his undoing, for they show that he pulls back from making judgments, he fails to honestly assess the situation. Part of it might be that Kasdan is still too close to the people and to the times. He certainly knows something about the real world, but he doesn't want to bare his dreams to close scrutiny. Until he is able to do that, his creations will, though perhaps having moments of depth, be characterized by shallowness, even if they are over the heads of others who are both making and watching films.

Although *The Big Chill* is a mass release, it is really a cult film, given the fact that there are references made or alluded to that must be caught and understood. There is a great deal of cliché, some of which, properly interpreted, acts like a



message in shorthand. The most obvious instance of this is the soundtrack, which is keyed to the events, not the mindless pounding of a *Flasdance*. There's a great deal of Motown (Smokey smoothly singing his songs, not Linda Ronstadt doing a bastardized cover), The Young Rascals, Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Band, Procol Harum. What is missing includes any of the so-called psychedelic music (e.g., no "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds") and, most tellingly, any revolutionary music: not one instance of Grace Slick shouting "Up against the wall," not a bit of Country Joe and the Fish, not even anything by Ann Arbor's houseband of the period in question, the MC-5. Much of the missing music was more popular with those who excoriated it than with those who were supposedly smashing the state while listening to it. Aha! But there is a Rolling Stones tune, and it's even said to be the dearly departed's favorite song. Here Kasdan borders on the bathetic—but only if certain aspects of the tune are identified. The song is "You Can't Always Get What You Want," a fitting piece for a funeral in that the original version opens with a plaintive French horn solo. The song is unusual among the works of Messrs. Jagger and Richards since in it

they seem to recognize that they are two self-centered poseurs. One of the lines in the song is most telling about the life and times of the participants in *The Big Chill*: "I went down to the demonstration, to get my fair share of abuse, singing 'We're going to vent our frustrations—if we don't, we're gonna blow a 50-amp fuse!'" Even then, some of the so-called militants recognized that it was a combination of striking poses and show-biz. There is one more thing that works in Kasdan's favor with regard to its application to the suicide: the song is included on an album titled *Let It Bleed*.

One of the differences between *The Big Chill* and something written by, say, Neil Simon, is that the characters don't simply feel, but they think about feeling. While they regularly fall into the La Brea tar pits of banality, the effort is laudable. One of the few American filmmakers who acknowledges the existence of what can be broadly called philosophy is Woody Allen, and he makes reference to it only to laugh at it. Should Kasdan continue in this direction and not fall back into the simplicity of his *Continental Divide*, by the time his graduates are ready for their 20-year reunion, he may have something. □

for the unsubtle Sam Peckinpah, knows that messages are best delivered to a mass audience through the broadest of gestures. He recognizes that the typical filmmaker, intellectual pretensions notwithstanding, doesn't want to get mixed up in matters of politics and economics. So he sets up the film, a sort of illegitimate child of Costa-Gavras's bastard *Missing*, as if it is a true rendering by using documentary-style subtitles, showing a real-but-fabricated cover of *Time*, using topical references (e.g., one journalist to another: "Gee, I haven't seen you since Three Mile Island!"), and by shooting it on a very convincing set in Mexico. He populates the set with people who will evoke love or hate—there's no in-between. The leads are all out of some *Filmmakers Guide to Propaganda for the Public, 1983 Edition*. Foremost, there's the macho-beefcake photojournalist (blond hair, simian features) who falls for a woman reporter whose only apparent characteristics are those which would be the result of living with the *Jane Fonda Workout Book*. Unfortunately for the twosome—for a while, anyway—the woman happens to be married to a man who looks like Walter Cronkite, acts like Dan Rather, and is the photojournalist's mentor and meal ticket. Hanky-panky, as if it might offend viewers whereas the distortions of the Nicaraguan revolution won't, is commenced only after the unhappily marrieds separate, and the husband is eventually killed off (by Somoza's troops, of course) for good measure. There are two bad guys, one a holdover from World War II movies and the other of recent vintage. The former is straight out of Vichy: a smooth-talking, reptilian Frenchman who happens to be somehow involved with the C.I.A. and who is, therefore, a creep who receives his just deserts in the form of a bullet in the head. The latter is an all-American, brush-cut-topped man who is dastardly not because he is a soldier of fortune, but because he fights against the rebels.

Once these players are put into their positions, Spottiswoode has to show the viewer why the revolutionaries are

Illumination for the Dimwits

***Under Fire*; Directed by Roger Spottiswoode; Written by Ron Shelton and Clayton Frohman; Orion.**

In contemporary films dealing with fighting, soldiers are out and journalists are in. While this may be a hangover from Vietnam and Watergate, it is more likely just evidence that many moviegoers have overinflated self-images. That is, soldiers are conventionally not intellectuals (otherwise they would be commanders, and even they are suspect today), and as viewers nowadays like to think themselves to be very bright, they prefer to identify with those who seem to use their minds for a living. But the journalist-

heroes in *Under Fire*, who treat war like reporters covering the international soccer circuit (i.e., this week Africa, next week Latin America), are less cognizant of what is going on around them—both personally and socially—than are those whom they are supposed to enlighten. For example, after a two-minute pool-side chat over cocktails, a newsmagazine correspondent and his photojournalist sidekick know all that they need to discern, for their purposes, about the situation in Nicaragua in 1979: the rebels are good; Somoza and the American government are bad, skip the Q.E.D.—this is the age of immediate enlightenment. Roger Spottiswoode, former film editor

good. This he does through the use of a single individualized rebel character (there's no need to confuse things, it seems), a young man named Pedro. This benign boy wears Nikes on his feet and pulls a Baltimore Orioles cap on his head before he whips a curve ball that happens to be a grenade into a bell tower held by government soldiers. As any American male viewer knows, a kid with an arm like that can't be all bad. While there is still joy in Mudville, the shutterbug, his sweetheart, and the would-be Cy Young Award winner swagger away from the rubble. Pedro remarks, "I like the Sandinistas—and I like the Baltimore Orioles." Before the viewer can figure out that the nicest thing that can be said about the forced correspondence between the two organizations is that it is diabolical, dear Pedro is shot—by the vicious American mercenary. From that point on, grosser emotions are the keynote; the American lovers hop into bed with the revolutionaries.

Since the audience is by this time, presumably, fully on the side of the protagonists, who are on a constant sweaty run away from the soldiers who would like

to shoot them, and with good reason, the beef and cheese confections can stoop to any levels and pervert truths in any manner for the Sandinistas, who come off like a scrubby Little League team taking on (inept) pros. All aspects of the film support this stance. For example, a bus filled with explosives (a favorite deadly tool of terrorists) destroys a tank and Jerry Goldsmith's upbeat music booms out as if the audience is to leap up and perform a variation on the rumba. Finally, the state is smashed, and there's real dancing in the streets of Managua, sort of like there was in the streets of Baltimore last October. The journalist-heroes arrive on the scene to buy souvenirs—rebel flags, or pennants—then drive off in a taxi to wreak their romantic havoc in another part of the world about which they are equally ignorant. The audience leaves the theater, thinking itself entertained and enlightened about current events and foreign policy. But the images they have seen, which are free of Cuban or Soviet "advisers" (yet there is a tableaux straight out of *Che!*), are about as true to life as are the mirrors at a carnival sideshow. (SM) □

the 1960's that practiced in suburban two-car garages and played in junior high school gyms. The album is Dead, we think.

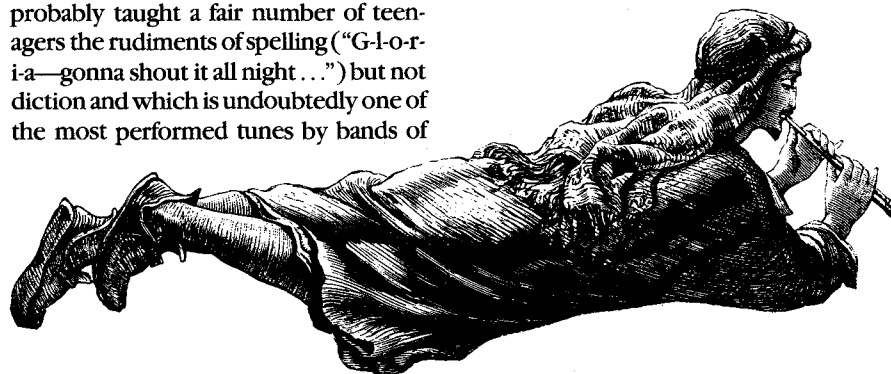
Coincident with the release of *Alive, She Cried*—though accidentally so, we suspect—Ray Manzarek, former keyboard player of The Doors, appeared with *Carmina Burana* (A&M Records), his arrangement of Carl Orff's cantata, which was first performed in 1937. Orff, as is well known by people who keep tabs on such things, based the *cantiones profane*, "Songs of Beuron, Profane Songs," on 13th-century manuscripts. In a sense, the mere idea of a man who played a Farfisa organ in a rock band performing Orff's work is outrageous, but that's only if the musicians who perform what is generally considered to be degenerated noise are thought to have leaped fully undressed from the top of a Fender amp. Many of the so-called "rock" musicians (an ill-defined epithet) had to practice, practice, practice the same things that those musicians of a similar age who now play in symphony orchestras had to endure. Manzarek is not the first keyboard player of his type who has selected a piece of music that is not based on feedback and heavily amplified bass drums; Keith Emerson, for example, has been doing it for years: witness his versions of works by Mussorgsky, Copland, and Bernstein. Actually, Manzarek's choice is more fitting than it is odd. The lyrics (which are in Latin, a language which few hear sung in these post-Vatican II days) are full of desire, decadence, decay, and drinking; Jim Morrison

MUSIC

Recycling

Jim Morrison is dead and buried and thriving in Paris. That is a fact, not the name of a new bit for the dinner theater circuit. Morrison—the rock singer who had his loins between his ears and pretensions of being a filmmaker (Pauline Kael admired him) and a poet (a sort of Gordon Lightfoot in leather pants)—has overcome the fickleness of the public spotlight; he has managed to become more popular more than 10 years after he died in a French bathtub than he was when he drunkenly prowled through L.A. Sales of albums by The Doors, the group Morrison headed, are high, better than ever. So it makes sense—and dollars—for Elektra to bring out *Alive, She Cried*,

an album containing live (once-upon-a-time, that is) performances by The Doors. One of the numbers featured is the standard "Gloria," the song that probably taught a fair number of teenagers the rudiments of spelling ("G-l-o-r-i-a—gonna shout it all night...") but not diction and which is undoubtedly one of the most performed tunes by bands of



wouldn't have felt odd shouting them. (Fortunately, a more conventional choral approach is employed.)

Manzarek's *Carmina Burana* was produced by Philip Glass and Kurt Munkacsi. Munkacsi has done a great deal of production work with Glass; he also worked with the other rock corpse that refuses to die, John Lennon. Glass is appropriate to the project. While *Carmina Burana* includes a significant number of ostinatos, it is less repetitive than Glass' work tends to be (e.g., "Etoile Polaire" on his *North Star* album [Virgin Records]).

Not only has he mastered loops, he seems to have developed a sense of how the past can be melded into the present in a workable way. As such, the synthesizers and other instruments of this generation used in *Carmina Burana* become unobtrusive, for the most part. While not an unqualified success, Manzarek's recording is a serious work. It will undoubtedly end up in the cutout racks at the youth-oriented music stores that will stock it. The Doors albums, in the same stores, of course, will become more dear. (SM) □

ART

Léger

Peter de Francia: *Fernand Léger*; Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

During the fabulous, legendary, supreme outburst of artistic creativity that occurred during the first three decades of this century, concentrated in Europe between Vitebsk and Pyrenees and called "avant-garde" (or the School of Paris, modern abstraction, fauvism, cubism, futurism, expressionism, constructionism, suprematism, surrealism, etc., etc., etc.), Paris became the world's art capital. But the cultural phenomenon itself was overwhelmingly cosmopolitan in nature. Although there were many Frenchmen among the crowd of masters and geniuses that populated the Left Bank ateliers, the number of Spaniards, Germans, Lithuanian Jews, and Russians involved was such that to talk about the art produced in Paris during that period as "French" is to create confusion and misunderstanding. However, among all the Picassos, Chagalls, and Archipenkos, there was Fernand Léger, an arch-Frenchman, a veritable Frenchman's Frenchman. His appearance and manner were both typically French, yet he made, perhaps, the most internationalist contribution to the movement with a bulk of work that could have been painted anywhere in

the world. He always adored what he called "a concrete reality," but ended up, according to his biographer, Professor de Francia, as the conceptualist of "art as spectacle." His naive, voluminous monumentalism always flirted with playfulness of details, colors, graphic paraphernalia. He was a committed communist, but in the Stalin-Zhdanov era of socialist realism, his art was scorned as degenerated imperialist subversion by Soviet critics. His Frenchness of habits and opinionated prejudices put together with his yearning for international brotherhood was an ironic inconsistency for which he had to pay. His contribution to contemporary decorative arts—posters, murals, stage design, advertisement techniques—is immeasurable and priceless.

Fernand Léger itself is something of an international work—at least of the Western alliance. The author, whose name sounds Portuguese, is a professor at the Royal College of Art in London; the book was printed in Italy and carries the imprint of an American press. Prof. Francia's text has obvious informative shortcomings: for some reason, Léger's political allegiances, so important in his overall portraiture, are meagerly addressed, and even the date of his death is exceptionally hard to find. □

Letter from Canada:
Legislating Oppression

by Kenneth McDonald

The appointment of a Parliamentary Task Force on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society was the latest in a series of attempts to persuade Canadians that their country must become a miniature United Nations in order to substantiate a political theory. The theorist is Pierre Elliott Trudeau; his theory is that "nations belong to a transitional period in world history" and that a pluralistic Canada could become "a brilliant prototype for the molding of tomorrow's civilization."

To this end, the focus of Canada's immigration policy was changed. The country's traditional sources of immigrants—the British Isles, Europe, the United States, and Australia—were given a back seat to Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Central and South America, and the West Indies. Between 1964 and 1968, 84 percent of Canada's immigrants came from its traditional sources. Ten years later, because of policies that discourage immigration from these sources while actively encouraging immigration from elsewhere, that figure had fallen to 50 percent. The objective of the government seems to be to change the character of Canada.

One of the main problems with the legislated approach is that it overlooks the fact that people are different. Conflict can arise between individuals of different origin if the people who go from a native land to live in a foreign one fail to adapt to its customs. It is their insistence upon importing and continuing to practice foreign customs that results in their being treated as foreigners. In this matter of "visible minorities" it is not individuals—natives or newcomers—who are at fault, but the government. Left to them-

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selves, native and newcomer alike would fall within the varying degrees of success or failures that attend us all. The justification for government's coercive power is to prevent one individual, in the exercise of his freedom, from infringing upon the freedom of others. When government uses that power to set one group above another group, to give one group an advantage at the expense of another, or in any way to discriminate between the people who consent to be governed, it disturbs the peace and order which it is government's prime duty to secure.

It used to be that the newcomer, having chosen to live in the new surroundings, would adapt to them, becoming less and less conspicuous every day. Now he joins others in groups of similar origin. No longer a minority of one, he has become one of the minority. The use of the government's coercive power to protect minorities' rights discourages them from assimilating. The immigrants then attract the hostility of the majority who developed the traditions and customs that the newcomers reject.

Yet, without seeking the consent of the electorate, 10 of Canada's first ministers imposed upon the nation a Charter of Rights and Freedoms which establishes discrimination as a part of Canadian life. Having declared that "Every individual is equal before and under the law . . . without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability," the Charter immediately contradicts itself with the statement that the previous section "does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."

In other words, the quota systems which are the inevitable consequence of "any law, program or activity . . ." are now institutionalized in Canada. No poli-

tician or government official will admit to it, but just as there are quotas for French Canadians in Canada's civil and military services, to secure a representation in proportion to French Canadians in the Canadian population, so will there



be quotas for every visible minority in both the federal service and in the services of the provinces where visible minorities are most numerous.

However, the Parliamentary Task Force will not limit its purview to visible minorities. The chairman intends "to interpret his mandate in the broadest possible way . . . so as to take in not only skin color and racial origin but any situation that would ultimately see an individual or group of individuals being treated as a minority by the majority in which they live." He seems to want to make it so that there will be scarcely a Canadian who dares to claim membership in the fast dissolving majority lest he or she be accused of discriminating against people who are members of a minority.

Canadians are sometimes accused of being rather a dull lot, not given to extremes of opinion, and secure—even smug—in the possession of bountiful natural resources. The accusation fails to take into account the energy and initiative of Canadians past and present who converted, and still convert, those resources into tangible benefits. Whatever the cause, there has developed a national characteristic of inestimable value: the courtesy and tolerance with which Canadians look upon and deal with one another. A national government which understood and appreciated that characteristic would seek to foster it. But here we are met by a Canadian paradox: that people who are courteous and tolerant toward one another have voted since 1968 to be governed by a man who is neither courteous nor tolerant, and who, in consequence, has stirred

up animosities in Canada that will take a long time to heal.

Creating the Parliamentary Task Force on Visible Minorities was an inevitable outcome of that unpalatable truth. It derives from a perception of Canada and other nations as mere motels on the road to world government. The man whose policies have burdened Canada with a proliferation of federal departments and Crown corporations looks confidently toward a world that will be run the same way: by a gigantic bureaucracy from which there will be no escape. Such a world, and its luckless citizens, will be bound by rules and regulations designed to cover every facet of daily life. The task of enforcing them will fall to armies of officials for which Canada's present committees and tribunals are models.

That scheme cannot brook the differences which distinguish every individual from every other. All must conform to the model: the productive and regenerative mass that the central plan requires for its fulfillment.

The threat to individual freedom will not disappear from Canada with the departure of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, though it will subside for a while since the tide of public opinion is flowing away from the idea of the centralized all-powerful state that Trudeau personifies and dreams about. But the idea will survive. Exposing its fallacies is no easy task for politicians who are subject to the temptations that accompany the power of office. Is it too much to expect that some of those politicians will recognize the dangers and see that government, when it uses its coercive power to change the shape of a mass that is made up of individuals, can no longer serve them? Canadians are all different; all, so long as government in Canada is limited by consent of the governed, are free. It is the attempt to band some of those individuals into particular masses that changes the form of government from a limited one to an oppressive one. Searching out and institutionalizing minorities is a giant step along that treacherous road. □

THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

The Ingersoll Prizes

On December 8, 1983, in Chicago's Ritz-Carlton hotel, The Ingersoll Prizes were awarded for the first time. Mr. Jorge Luis Borges was the recipient of the T. S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing, and Mr. James Burnham received the Richard M. Weaver Award for Scholarly Letters.

The Reverend Richard John Neuhaus, theologian and director of The Rockford Institute/New York-Center for Religion and Society, offered the invocation:

Look with favor, we beseech you Almighty God, upon what we do here. We would award no excellence that is not of your giving. We would acknowledge no creativity that is not also the work of the Creator of all. In honoring these your servants we therefore offer praise to you.

Establish, we pray, the giving of these prizes, that they may be a sign and an encouragement—of a conservatism that contends for all that is of abiding worth; of a liberalism that bespeaks generosity of spirit and hopefulness of purpose; of a radicalism that refuses to settle for anything less than truth.

Bless, then, this company to our good, and bless us to your service. Amen.

Following the invocation, Dr. John A. Howard, president of both The Rockford Institute and The Ingersoll Foundation, stated in his formal welcome:

"Last May at a formal reception in Washington, D.C.'s Meridian House we made known the establishment of The Ingersoll Prizes to a gathering of governmental officers, educators, publishers, executives of cultural organizations, and the news media. President Reagan sent a message of congratulations and good wishes. The Honorable Terrel Bell, Secretary of Education, gave his direct support to the undertaking. What follows is an excerpt from Secretary Bell's text:

The philosophers who call us to examine the meaning of life, who can distill causes and consequences from the turbulence of history, deserve

more recognition than they receive from their contemporaries Every endeavor which celebrates the accomplishments of such men and women is to be warmly welcomed.

"He enunciated the precise concern which was the genesis of The Ingersoll Prizes. Let me take you back to that beginning. The Ingersoll Milling Machine Company, which will soon celebrate its centennial as one of Rockford's major manufacturers, established its corporate foundation 35 years ago. Under the thoughtful leadership of Robert Gaylord, Jr., that Foundation supported many organizations, local and national, which in one way or another worked to perpetuate the economic, social, and moral vitality of the American experiment.

"However, as America's vitality in all three of those dimensions peaked and began to wane rapidly, the corporate leadership and the Foundation's directors determined to redirect their contributions to other kinds of projects which might help to reverse that downward course. They were intrigued by the thesis repeatedly voiced by The Rockford Institute that it is neither politics nor economics which determines the shape of history, but rather it is the culture, as it forms beliefs and preferences and values and consequently human behavior. And so the Foundation turned to The Rockford Institute for guidance in the deployment of its resources.

"Of the many projects now supported by the Foundation, the program of The Ingersoll Prizes is the largest and the most prominent. And it is fitting that it should be. Each civilization is built upon a specific vision of order and virtue. For a nonauthoritarian society, given the human inclinations toward disorder and dissension, its survival requires that the democratic vision of order and virtue be kept prominent in the minds of the citizens. In our era, the cultural leadership of the West has been blind to this requirement and has enthroned as its models and mentors, scholars and artists and writers of an iconoclastic bent, generally

ignoring the creative sources of private and civic inspiration.

"Our purpose in establishing the prizes, then, is both to provide a symbol of abiding public gratitude to authors who address the themes of order and virtue, and to stimulate an ever-larger readership for the wisdom which they have made available by their life's labors."

Dr. Howard went on to read a portion of a letter sent by Mrs. T. S. Eliot to The Ingersoll Foundation. Mrs. Eliot wrote:

Although sorry not to be with you this evening, except in spirit, I am delighted that Jorge Luis Borges is to receive the first T. S. Eliot Award, so generously conceived by the Ingersoll Foundation in memory of my husband.

Prior to the award presentation, Mr. Leopold Tyrmand, vice-president of The Rockford Institute and executive secretary of The Ingersoll Prizes, summarized the careers of the two honorees. Mr. Tyrmand stated:

"In recent decades, we, believing as we do in the power of letters, were troubled by a suspicion that in literature and the humanities there has been a diminishing endeavor to understand humanness as both destiny and spiritual substance; that writers have, by and large, abandoned their mission. We were inclined to think that the very fate of Western civilization had become contingent on both the rehabilitation and the cultivation of feelings and attitudes forgotten, spurned, or demolished by the modern culture's submissiveness to fallacious exegeses and brutally unenlightened doctrines. The fundamental worth of ethical norm, grace, and dignity had become, in our view, endangered and—if not rescued—would soon vanish from the grasp of the human imagination. As our attempt to restore to prominence those standards of intellectual integrity and moral elegance, which, in the past, obliged thinkers and writers to assist mankind in understanding itself and its role on this planet, we therefore called The Ingersoll Prizes into being. As we wrote in our initial statement of pur-

pose: 'The paramount criterion for this recognition will be the creative articulation of permanent values—truth, faith, integrity, reason, conscience, tradition—rendered with merit in works of art or intellect. At this juncture of history, support must be given to those who are willing to devote their labors and gifts of mind to understanding Judeo-Christian standards of ethics as well as America's incomparable service to mankind in promoting a pluralistic society and the principles of free inquiry. We wish to encourage those creative processes which will reassert the Western concept of freedom from which the American civilization—our common asset—has emerged.'

"We honor tonight two gentlemen whose lifework corresponds with the highest criteria of The Ingersoll Prizes. Mr. Borges symbolizes the complexity and depth of the Western intellectual heritage. A reverence for the past and an understanding of it as the primary agent of both the present and the future have found a most intriguing and poetic expression in his work. His is the marvelous universe of meditations unaffected by social turmoil and biological determinism. In a pricelessly spare form, he has synthesized and miniaturized a galaxy of intimate sentiments, careful sensibilities, and some of the subtlest nuances of Western experience and thought. He revived the mystique of tradition and opened it for the scrutiny of the contemporary man. These are intensely pursued insights in today's America, and Mr. Borge's cognizance is precious. After Kafka, he remains, perhaps, the last practitioner of modern, meticulously updated metaphysics.

"Mr. Burnham, early in life, sought out explanations of social and political mechanisms. His findings and inferences put him at odds with the prevailing orthodoxies. In an era when liberal scholasticism began to impose dogmas on philosophy and politics, severely limited the perspectives of free inquiry, and restricted the notions of social morality to a rigid set of antiempirical prescrip-

tions, Mr. Burnham had the courage to say 'no' and incur the wrath of the rulers of opinion. He produced volumes that enlarged our knowledge of contemporaneity, but paid for the nonconformism of his views with decades of ostracism from official channels of recognition.

"It is a happy occasion that permits us to celebrate the virtues of excellence, and distinction of being true to a principle—as they are embodied in these two men."

Mr. Clayton Gaylord, chairman of The Ingersoll Foundation, then made the formal presentations of The Ingersoll Prizes. An essay by Mr. Borges, written exclusively for the *Chronicles of Culture*, and Mr. Burnham's address, on the occasion of receiving the award, will appear, respectively, in the March and April issues of this journal. Additionally, an address by Dr. Ronald Berman, chairman of the 1983 Awards Jury, will be published in the May issue. □

Lebanon, et alia

This journal is not into politics, and is even less into the business of advising. But as citizens, observers, disciples of post-Humean political skepticism, and admirers of the Orwellian devotion to commonsensicality, we are willing to slightly bend our principle in order to voice some suggestions.

1. Let's get out of Lebanon. By being there we are serving some untidy interests of the so-called Arab moderates—a highly untrustworthy crowd. Lebanon cannot be preserved as an entity, a state; that should be evident to even the victims of the worst cases of glaucoma. Saudi Arabia (and *its* most influential friend, who happens to be *our* Secretary of Defense) promotes its vision of Lebanese "balance," which is quite an odd one that promotes giving Syria an enormous amount of cash earned in America for conversion into Soviet missiles that can accurately destroy American reconnaissance planes. Of course, the Saudi princes, known for their sterling honesty and straightforwardness, loudly clamor

for a Lebanon free of "all" interventionist forces, including American ones, but this is not what they tell the State Department mavens during their cozy, 12-course noshes in D.C., during which they exhort us not to go but to stay in Lebanon and take on anyone whom they consider no-no for their grubby benefit. All in all, the situation in Lebanon is as politically coherent as the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* and to expect this state of things to be ordered on terms of Aristotelian political logic seems to us to be verging on the grotesque.

2. After leaving Lebanon, we should give all necessary material and financial support and an unswerving loyalty on the international scene to the Lebanese Christians and the Israelis—the only political and military forces that can serve honestly our interests in the area, as their own interests converge with ours. On their successful cooperation rests our ultimate influence in the region. Once the Christian Maronites carve a viable chunk of territory for themselves and establish, with their proven acumen, a functional polity, the moderate Arabs will return to their fold. After all, the Lebanese Christians *are* Arabs, and they know more about banking and commerce than Bedouin royalties and Saudi sons of the desert. If the Lebanese Druses and Shiites want to associate with Syria, or Khomeini, that's their business as long as they're doing it on their own pieces of real estate. Such solutions will involve painful migrations of large numbers of displaced persons, but this would be no more unbearable than what went on in Central and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II.

3. Concentrate on Latin America—that is where the Soviet threat to the fundamentals of our foreign policy is most vicious, intricate, and lethal. In the Middle East, the Soviets confront us *and* the Islamic fanaticism—not our ally, but not theirs either. In the Americas, we confront three enemies: virulent anti-Yankeeism (not without some moral legitimacy), endemic social radicalism rife with a gangsterlike terrorist mystique,

and powerful Soviet efforts which aim to ruthlessly dominate, orchestrate, and manipulate both nationalism and radicalism against us, our interests, and our value system. Those forces have a hateful and inexorable associate within our own society: the American community of leftist useful idiots who delude themselves into imagining that by thwarting our endeavors they help the Latin American masses to achieve liberty and prosperity while, in fact, they help the Soviet quest for global hegemony.

So much for what we think about all that, and which certainly will command no attention among those who decide what should be done. But, having said it, our conscience is clear and we feel much better. □

Tactfulness & Truthfulness

The entire liberal press was deeply disappointed that President Reagan did not lash out at his host in South Korea, President Chun Doo Hwan, for his dictatorial manners and political misbehavior. "His [Reagan's] speech . . . contained no hint of criticism of the human rights record of the Chun regime," whined the *Chicago Tribune*, a relatively mildly worded reproach when measured against the other howls emitted.

Given the general tone of bitterness and disgust, we imagine that what the amalgamated liberal left would have loved to hear was President Reagan telling President Chun that he is a ruthless butcher, manic tyrant, and a bloody oppressor for keeping some dissidents under house arrest during the visit of the American delegation, preventing anti-American demonstrations, practicing censorship, and for generally behaving like a despicable totalitarian masquerading as an authoritarian. We think that the invectives, though passionately overblown, are not devoid of some point: in our opinion, Mr. Chun is not exactly an ardent practitioner of John Stuart Mill's political ethics, and we doubt that he holds the *New York Times* in high

esteem. However, we would opt for apprising him of all of his political shortcomings *if* the liberal media suggests to President Reagan that, upon meeting Andropov in Moscow, he remind his host of some fundamental facts:

—Mr. Andropov holds an undisclosed number of political prisoners—perhaps hundreds of thousands—in concentration camps and mental hospital wards for no other reason than their beliefs which are at variance with his;

—he tortures them—not by vulgar means of electric shocks, but by means of destabilizing drugs or through forced labor in Arctic conditions without basic food supplies, where the prisoner of conscience is practically doomed to die without a legal sentence and without adverse

publicity;

—he suppresses any attempt of free expression by jailing indiscriminately anyone who would conceivably say anything that displeases him;

—and that Mr. Andropov began his career as a secret police thug, was a ruthless bloody butcher, who, in all probability, personally killed people who were innocent of any possible crime in the eyes of any citizen of democratic America whom Mr. Reagan represents.

We suspect that both a *New York Times* editorial writer and an essayist for *The Progressive* would respond to such a suggestion in unison by saying: "It's not *that* simple . . ." That's exactly why we wholeheartedly endorse Mr. Reagan's handling of the South Korean visit. □

JOURNALISM

Andropov Mystery

It was not a letter to the editor, for which a tolerant journal needs not be responsible, but an article, something featured as information, so that its laudable attitude is more than a mere expression of opinion. There we read:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called communists. . . . Is it not to the everlasting shame of the American people that those folk in the world who struggle for noble concepts are dismissed as communists? . . . There is no point in anyone being alarmed by the alliance between black or Latin nation-states in this hemisphere and the Soviet Union. Where else could any Socialist government find assistance?

These lines sound as if they were taken directly from the manual of a Soviet journalist whose commitment is to propaganda at any price—be it truth or mere correctness—as he is fully prepared to be an employee of *Pravda*, *Trud*, or

Izvestia. But it was not found in any of those papers. It was published in the *Village Voice*. (The *Village Voice*, incidentally, is owned by Mr. Rupert Murdoch, who, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, is:

a paragon of the old-fashioned Puritan work ethic who drinks only white wine, smokes not at all and is deeply devoted to his wife and children.

Devotion to wife and children as evidence of morality is of specious value: Goebbels was also an exemplary husband and father.) The article in question was signed "John F. Davis." We don't believe it. As Western journalists have reported of late, no one has seen Mr. Andropov recently; he even missed the November Day parade. This comes as little surprise to us. Could it be that Mr. Andropov is working for Mr. Murdoch under the pseudonym "John Davis"? After all, he needs hard currency to satisfy his addiction to Glenn Miller records and Red Label scotch. □